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A SOCIAL ANALYSIS OF GRAZING MANAGEMENT ON NATIONAL FOREST LANDS:  
A CASE STUDY IN CATRON COUNTY, NEW MEXICO

By

Alexis S. Watts

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree

of

MASTER OF SCIENCE

in

Sociology

Approved:

UTAH STATE UNIVERSITY  
Logan, Utah

1999

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## ABSTRACT

### A Social Analysis of Grazing Management on National Forest Lands:

#### A Case Study in Catron County, New Mexico

by

Alexis S. Watts, Master of Science

Utah State University, 1999

Major Professor: Dr. Richard S. Krannich  
Department: Sociology

The rural west in this country faces increased national pressure concerning the management of natural resources on public lands. Issues regarding natural resource management are becoming more important as they continue to affect rural communities and capture the attention of a variety of interest groups. Natural resource managers are increasingly required to consider social dimensions of resource use and management. Lack of consideration in these areas can lead to dissatisfied, and even hostile, local residents and interest groups. Often land managers face criticism from many groups at once as a result of management decisions.

This study analyzed a particular resource issue in a particular region of the west: grazing management in Catron County, New Mexico. The findings indicate a complex social structure with an historical base in natural resource dependence, and a personal independence from highly regulated grazing management. Changes in national legislation and changes in the Forest Service over time have contributed to the erosion of relationships between the Forest Service and ranchers and environmentalists. A socially informed, pragmatic and proactive approach to grazing management is currently lacking in Catron County.

(85 pages)



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Lex Watts

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

The application of social science research to rangeland management is a fairly novel phenomenon in federal land management agencies. However, the inclusion of social assessments in land management and policy decisions is increasingly important in all areas of natural resource management. As conflicts between various users, abusers, and admirers of public land and resources escalate, government land management agencies are often caught in the midst of confrontation.

Social science tools can aid in constructing management decisions that are coordinated with the needs of various constituent groups by better understanding the links between people, and natural resources and the agencies that manage them (Endter-Wada et al. 1998). The documentation of human-environment linkages and the social impacts of agency action may allow agencies to better manage and monitor projects and policy decisions by recognizing both negative and positive effects in advance of implementation, and searching for socially and scientifically acceptable alternatives.

#### *Purpose of Study*

The purpose of this study was to examine the relationships between the range managers of the Gila National Forest and the affected residents of Catron County, New Mexico. This research is derived from a case study on the Gila National Forest, managed by the U. S. Department of Agriculture Forest Service, in Catron County, New Mexico. This area was selected for specific reasons. Primarily, Catron County provides a unique and especially challenging context for federal land management programs because of its widely recognized role as an instigator of an effort to transfer public land ownership and/or control to local entities, called the county rights movement. Recent litigation has drawn focus to the county and may set

precedents for dealing with the social aspect of policy change. Also, about two thirds of Catron County is public land. The logging industry used to be healthy and active in the county, and the course of events which halted most of the timber cutting on National Forest land in the county is one of the multitude of current and historical cultural factors which fuel the current hostility over grazing on National Forest rangelands.

In light of these and other social and political changes in the county, this study assessed the means and effectiveness of the Forest Service's current practices of utilizing social science information and incorporating this information into rangeland policies and decisions.

### *Research Questions*

The human dimensions of natural resource management comprise a broad array of issues and linkages between human groups and communities and natural resources. In order to refine the objectives of the proposed study, it will be necessary to focus on a few salient issues. The following research questions are a means of organizing the study into a reasonable framework.

1. In what ways does the history of natural resource dependence in Catron County relate current social and political friction over grazing management and changes to grazing practices, as well as relationships with grazing land managers?
2. In terms of grazing lands, who are the key constituents or influence groups of the Forest Service in Catron County with respect to the policy contexts outlined in this study? What interest groups exist within and outside of the county?
3. To what extent does the Forest Service solicit and process information from or about these groups of people? In what ways do management decisions reflect consideration of public input and/or social assessment efforts?

These are important, salient questions not only for the Forest Service, but for all managers of public lands. These are also important, salient questions for the field of natural resource sociology. Understanding people and their values concerning uses of public lands is a

growing necessity in public lands management. While contributing to the field of natural resource sociology, this research will also have practical applications to the management of natural resources.

The intent of this research project is to examine information that will contribute to informed answers to these and other important sociological and political questions. This research may help social researchers who are studying the increasing change taking place in many of the west's rural communities. By examining such a volatile place as Catron County, insights derived from this research can be applied to other, less acrimonious communities that are facing the advent of similar circumstances. It may be possible to use this research for developing alternative means of determining natural resource management decisions, thereby abating such controversy as has erupted in Catron County. Not only will this be important for sociologists, it will also be useful to natural resource decision makers who manage public lands in potentially contentious situations.

The Forest Service in Catron County supports the idea of using human dimensions factors to inform management decisions. Insights about the relationships between people and natural resources, and between constituents and land management agencies, can contribute socially appropriate decisions that are also consistent with scientific land management principles. Evaluating the process by which this area of the Gila National Forest gathers and uses social information may be useful to other local governments and federal agencies, whether as a documentation of a successful social science approach or as documentation of a "learning experience" which acknowledges the need for alternative avenues of social science application.

## CHAPTER II

### LITERATURE REVIEW AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The relationship between society and nature in America was notably documented by Roderick Nash in *Wilderness and the American Mind* (1973). In this book Nash described the evolution of American attitudes toward the environment from a savage wilderness to a recreational haven. As our society's attitudes towards nature changed, laws, policies, and regulations were created to reflect those changes. Increasing environmentally oriented values in the United States have been repeatedly examined (Buttel 1992; Dunlap 1992). Sometimes these national environmental trends were felt to impinge on rural areas because changes in society as a whole do not dictate the opinions of individuals and many people do not conform to national trends. In some cases these people can have significant influence in a particular area. Such is the case in Catron County, New Mexico, where the relationship between society and nature is the focus of acrid debate. Nash says that "history grows constantly"; the study of this debate in Catron County will help define the history of rural society and the changing values toward nature.

In a rural area like Catron County it is not surprising that many people rely on their natural environment to help construct their identity. The descendants of settlers who worked hard to make a living from the land often feel ties to the same piece of land, and the use of it (Jorgensen 1984). Many sociologists, including Gold (1985), have found strong ties between ranchers and their culture and their land. In an area where there are many such people, the landscape is a symbol of both individual and collective social identities and conflicts over land-uses may be exacerbated by the additional conflict over symbols and values of the social identity.

Much of the debate in Catron County centers on the Forest Service. The United States Forest Service is housed in the Department of Agriculture, a position which illustrates its roots as a utilitarian agency, not a preservation-oriented one. However, the Forest Service has changed its directives as dictated by society's changing values toward nature and natural resources. A study

by Farnham, Taylor, and Callaway (1995) suggests that the Forest Service has made significant shifts in management practices. These shifts favor noncommodity resource management and indicate that the Forest Service is cutting back on commodity production in order to cater to recreational and wildlife values. Furthermore, Jones and Taylor (1995) concluded that change within the Forest Service has largely been a result of courts and appeals processes. Society has been forcing the Forest Service to respond to changing values through litigation, and it has been successful; "...when litigants are successful in legal challenges against the agency, the court decision often results in substantive on-the-ground changes in management, thereby providing an incentive for additional use of litigation as a means to alter agency actions" (p. 310).

Environmentalists have been especially successful in using the court system as a means to produce change in the Forest Service. However, the changes that have ensued as a result of litigation, largely enforcing existing policies, have rippled into the small communities of Catron County and have not been easily absorbed. Disparate fundamental beliefs about personal and community relationships with the natural resources in Catron County are clashing. Policy and management changes dictated through the court system do not account for the human dimensions of land management and result in flawed social dynamics among the litigators, the Forest Service, and those directly affected by the changes.

The Forest Service has also had to respond to internal changes. Cramer et al. (1993) described how differences of opinion and difficult decision making can be the result of conflicting value orientations. Individuals within the Forest Service may not agree with the agency as a whole. Understanding the values of the Forest Service is as important as examining the values of the public in natural resource conflicts (Bullis and Kennedy, 1991).

Direct relationships between natural resource management changes and changes in the social and economic dynamics of rural societies are not always clear, but they are often miscalculated because of communities' ties to more complex political systems (Machlis, Force,



and Balice 1990). Through sociological analysis of the Northern spotted owl controversy, Freudenburg, Wilson, and O'Leary (1998) found that large misconceptions of the issue resulted in a gross oversimplification: jobs vs. owls. In truth, the logging industry in the northwest was already in decline long before the spotted owl became listed an endangered species. Through this example, the authors note the need for "increased sociological attention to the changing dynamics between societies and their natural resource base" (p. 2). Cramer et al. (1993) pointed out that "agency policies are only one of many factors affecting local communities, but they can exacerbate technological shifts that are contributing to the decline of many forest-dependent communities" (p. 488). Several authors have noted the advantages of using social science to inform natural resource management (Selin, Schuett, and Carr 1997; Walker and Daniels 1996; Endter-Wada et al. 1998). When so many human values are rooted in the landscape, it makes sense to pay attention to the human dynamics of land-use and land management.

#### *History of Land Ownership and Management in the American West*

In order to provide an historical perspective on current issues in Catron County, this section discusses important events that helped to shape the area's economic and social patterns. Beginning with an overview of land management in the western United States, this section describes Forest Service agendas and important land management laws, provides a brief history of grazing in the southwest, and ends with a review of the Sagebrush Rebellion and the county rights movement. The development of the Forest Service, grazing, and the ideas of the Sagebrush Rebellion play a central part in the current social dynamics of Catron County.

The General Land Ordinances of 1785 and 1787 established federal authority over America's western territories. The federal government wanted to make money from these lands, but "the pressures to settle the West soon overwhelmed the revenue needs of the government" (Nelson 1996:13). Anglo-American occupation of the west was pursued in the name of Manifest

Destiny, and settlers began the chore of "civilizing" the wilderness. The Homestead Act in 1862 allowed settlers title to land, usually in 160-acre parcels, for the price of five years of farming the land. Railroads and states also received large amounts of land during this disposal era. Such federal generosity was to change, however, with the onset of Progressive ideology.

Progressivism advocated the scientific management of land and society in general. Land, under this new regime, was best managed by technical experts. Another tenet of progressivism was that scientific functions like land management should be separate from politics. These ideas, in addition to the new federal policy of land retention, led to the creation of several natural resource management agencies. The Bureau of Reclamation was formed in 1902, the first wildlife refuge was created in 1903, the Forest Service was established in 1905, and the National Park Service took control over individually managed parks in 1916.

If public land management was a scientific undertaking, then it made sense to centralize it at the federal level. The federal government would have the personnel and resources to enlist the best technical talent of the nation. It could ensure that the far reaching activities of the public land agencies would all be coordinated in accord with national policies worked out by those with the skills to command such a role. (Nelson 1996:14)

And thus, the federal control over public lands was established by means of the Progressive ideology and utilitarian values.

The first director of the Forest Service, Gifford Pinchot, also espoused this utilitarian attitude. Pinchot advocated conservation, which was challenged by the preservationists who were led by John Muir. Pinchot's conservation mantra was use; "to him, untrammelled<sup>1</sup> wilderness was a form of waste" (Cawley 1993:24). The conservation ethic was often challenged by the preservation ethic in the policies that emerged from land management agencies in accordance with acts passed by Congress during the 1960s.

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<sup>1</sup> The definition of untrammelled is often misunderstood. I, not confined or limited: not hindered. From Webster's Third New International Dictionary. 1966. G. and C. Merriam Company. Springfield, Massachusetts, U.S.A.

### *History of Land Management Policy*

Natural resources were generally managed for commodity development during the early part of this century, pursuant to the values of the general public at the time. Forests were logged, grasslands were grazed, minerals mined, and rivers dammed. This “dominant use” approach to land management resulted in a tremendous amount of economic and political influence on both national and local levels. Policies formed at this time dictated land utilization. Changes from these early land management policies are relevant to the situation in Catron County.

By the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century several patterns of change eventually made it apparent that there were many emerging noneconomic values for public lands, in contrast with the extractive and use values dominating the land management programs at the time. S. Davis (1997) identifies four key change factors, the first of which is changing demographic patterns. As populations in the west began to grow in the middle of this century, newcomers and urbanites infiltrated the ranks of rural, long-term residents and modified the use-extraction atmosphere. Also, shifts in public land-use patterns starting around the 1970s showed an increase in outdoor appreciation and recreation which often conflicted with extractive land-uses (S. Davis 1997; Nash 1973). Both of these factors contributed to the third factor, which was an increase in the number, and diversity, of stakeholders. In addition, shifting political values across the country, including the emergence of widespread environmental values in the 1960s and 1970s, no longer condoned the domination of natural resource industry groups.

The emerging environmental values of the public in the United States became a powerful political message when a variety of conservation mandates gained the force of law. The following incomplete list of environmental legislation from the 1960s and 1970s is a congressional reflection of the widespread importance of the environmental movement in the United States.

Land and Water Conservation Fund Act of 1964  
 Public Land Law Review Commission of 1964  
 Highway Beautification Act of 1965  
 National Historic Preservation Act of 1966  
 Air Quality Act of 1967  
 National Trails System Act of 1968  
 Wild and Scenic Rivers Act of 1968  
 National Environmental Policy Act of 1969  
 Endangered Species Act of 1973  
 Federal Land Management Act of 1976  
 Surface Mining Control and Reclamation Act 1976  
 National Forest Management Act of 1976  
 Public Rangelands Improvement Act of 1978

This wave of environmentally conscious legislation translated into more restrictive management of the public lands, which in turn drew the ire of commodity interests. Consequently, land management agencies were often confronted with the undesirable decision of whether to pay more attention to ecological values or to remain with the status quo policies favored by traditional user groups.

The primary land management agency in this case study, The U. S. Forest Service, was faced with this dilemma. Not long after it was formed, the Forest Service began to feel pressure from all sides to account for its actions. Under fire from contending factions, the Forest Service decided to codify its mission. The management scheme developed by the Forest Service as a result of differing land-use preferences was called multiple-use. According to Nelson (1996), the multiple-use approach was more rhetoric than action.

It can be interpreted to suit the convenience of the interpreter. Multiple-use in practice meant the absence of precise directions and maintenance of wide administrative discretion. Administrators looked to the various interest groups to convey their wishes with respect to uses of the land. The "multiple-use" answer was one that provided an acceptable compromise among the contending interests. (p.14)

Actually, it would seem that no contending interests viewed the multiple-use approach as acceptable, but according to then Chief Forester Richard McArdle:

Being in the middle is exactly where we ought to be. I believe that our inability to satisfy completely each and every group of national-forest users is a definite sign of success in doing the job assigned to us. When each group is somewhat

dissatisfied, it is a sign that no one group is getting more than its fair share. (S. Davis 1997:34)

Applied multiple-use management may be possible as far as healthy public lands are concerned, however multiple-use management as far as people are concerned is an entirely different problem. As is slowly being realized, the professional, scientific job of land management in the Forest Service is inextricable from the necessity of a professional, scientific job of cooperating with people. Cawley and Freemuth (1997) have argued that the multiple-use directive itself has caused great strife between different groups. "Rather than focusing on the competing interests in the federal lands policy arena, we contend that the key problem is the structure of the decision process. More specifically, we argue that the current gridlock and acrimony in the federal lands arena results from an event that occurred on June 12, 1960" (p.33). This event was the signing the Multiple-Use Sustained Yield Act.

The Multiple Use-Sustained Yield Act provided a statutory basis for multiple use management. The act required the Forest Service to manage natural resources under its jurisdiction for purposes of recreation, range, timber, watershed, and wildlife and fish, and preservation.<sup>2</sup> Wilderness was also identified as a category of management, which later became a separate statutory mandate with the Wilderness Act of 1964.

The multiple-use idea has given all sides ammunition for criticizing the Forest Service's management actions. Although the Multiple-Use Act may have contributed greatly to current debates over land management and use, it is not the sole source of strife. Some researchers have this explanation:

Environmentalists have criticized agency methods and argue that the loss of native grasses has had disastrous effects on associated species, and that damage from grazing in some areas, particularly riparian (streamside) areas, is threatening the ecological functions of rangelands. Ranchers counter that the

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<sup>2</sup> The Federal Land Policy and Management Act (FLPMA) of 1976 mandated the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) to enact similar multiple-use management.

rangelands are in their best shape in a century. Both views are technically correct. The problem is that these two general groups measure, or value, different things- their expectations of the benefits that rangelands should provide are fundamentally different. (Cody and Baldwin 1998:5)

This is not simply an issue of multiple-use conflict, but also an issue of "custom and culture." There are strings attached here to the long tradition of grazing in New Mexico, and to the Sagebrush Rebellion and the more current county rights movements.

### *The Evolution of Ranching in the Southwest*

Cattle ranching in the southwest has changed dramatically since its introduction into the area before Arizona and New Mexico were part of the United States. Spanish conquerors coming north from Mexico arrived in what is now the American southwest in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. Spanish holdings were then claimed in 1821 when Mexico declared itself an independent nation. The Mexican War and the 1853 Gadsden Purchase established the New Mexico territory in the southwestern United States.

*Early ranching.* During the Spanish colonial period, large-scale ranching simply did not exist in the part of the southwest which was to become New Mexico. Although travelers in the area reported that Mexican haciendas supported tens of thousands of cattle, there was little market for cattle at the time, nor technology for water systems that would be required by such numbers of cattle. These facts, in addition to the incessant Apache hostilities, rather diminished the probability of the grandiose haciendas. In fact, by 1870 the federal census reported only 5,132 cattle in neighboring eastern Arizona (Sheridan 1992).

However, once the U.S. military abrogated the Apache threat, the cattle industry in the southwest did flourish. Thousands of cattle were shipped into the area to take advantage of the plentiful, but fragile, grasslands. Stock raisers from the plains region expanded their cattle empires into the southwest. The value of cattle skyrocketed. It did not take long for cattle ranching to develop from an economic pursuit to a cultural and political lifestyle.

The grasslands and sierras were useful only with accessible water sources. Ranchers soon became aware of the necessity of controlling water sources, and they developed their own rules to manage grazing rights based on protection of these water sources. However, without much more regulation than this, the cattle concentrated in riparian areas and contributed to a breakdown of the watersheds. Droughts and further overstocking compounded this; the rain did not follow the cow. "Very little rain fell during the summer of 1892, and the following winter and spring were dry. It was a disaster of biblical proportions- one in which nature and greed conspired to magnify one another's effects" (Sheridan 1992:7). Cattle carcasses replaced grass on the landscape. Droughts and overstocking had completely denuded vast tracts of land by the turn of the century. Deteriorating rangeland conditions forced a need for regulations on the open range.

*Regulations.* The Forest Service that had been created in 1905 was originally led by a politically savvy Chief Forester, Gifford Pinchot, who fostered a professional image for the new agency. This, in concert with a high degree of autonomy within the organization, allowed the Forest Service to function effectively on the ground. When the Forest Service recognized the need for range improvement, it began to regulate grazing on National Forest lands. "Early efforts to cut back on livestock use and to levy grazing fees to enhance conservation objectives were controversial but ultimately successful because of the ability of field rangers to contain disputes at the local level" (S. Davis 1997:75). This ability worked well for creating rapport with stock raisers, but would later be compromised.

The Forest Service established a leasing policy for National Forest grazing lands, and initiated a fee program. The remaining public domain was free and open for use until the passage of the Taylor Grazing Act. The Taylor Grazing Act was passed in 1934 to "stop injury to the public grazing lands by preventing overgrazing and soil deterioration, to provide for their orderly use, improvement, and development, to stabilize the livestock industry dependent upon the public range, and for other uses" (Sheridan 1992:11). In order to administer the new Act, an agency



called the Grazing Service was formed. The Grazing Service controlled the new grazing fee and permit program. (Eventually, in 1946, the Grazing Service was merged with the General Land Office and was renamed the Bureau of Land Management.) Although regulations intended to control public land grazing were imposed, many of the important land management laws which were later passed in Congress explicitly allow the continuance of public land grazing, such as the Multiple-Use Sustained Yield Act of 1960, the Federal Land Policy and Management Act of 1976, and the Public Rangelands Improvement Act of 1978.

Cattle grazing remained an important use of the public lands in the southwest, but no longer the only, or "best" use. Rangelands were requisitely managed not solely for maximum cattle forage, but for multiple public uses. It was essentially the changes required by multiple-use management that led to the emergence of the infamous Sagebrush Rebellion in the late 1970s.

### *The Sagebrush Rebellion*

The Sagebrush Rebellion was a statement of clashing values. The land-use values that had been the basis for western expansion and early land management remained intact in parts of the west, especially in places which relied heavily on natural resources. The newer values of environmental protection were by no means ubiquitous despite the influence environmentalists gained in Congress. Those who would come to be known as the Sagebrush Rebels felt that the congressional pendulum of support had swung too far away from traditional constituents and that land management agencies were catering the multiple-use directive in the favor of environmental interests. Politically, they felt underrepresented, and therefore turned to other means of effecting change.

You want to know why I believe that we have got to resort to more dramatic and emphatic statements such as the Sagebrush? It is the perverse and distorted way that the Department of Interior took a sincere, from my perspective at least, legislative product and tried to use it to arrive at tortured, twisted and preconceived bureaucratic desires and designs. (James Santini quoted in Cawley 1993:34)



The Sagebrush Rebellion had its origins in Nevada in 1979. The Nevada legislature passed a bill providing for state control of the 48 million acres of BLM managed land in Nevada. This was intended to directly conflict with the Nevada constitution ordinance which was required for admittance to the Union, and which stated that Nevada agrees to forever disclaim all rights to the public lands in Nevada which belong to the United States.

Although Nevada's actions may seem extreme, the measure was effective in drawing attention to the fact that 79 percent of Nevada is BLM land. The Sagebrush Rebellion was "a legally questionable but symbolically powerful message" (C. Davis 1997:82). Other western states with large amounts of public land quickly joined in the rebellion, although bills were usually quashed in the state legislatures. However, the Sagebrush Rebellion attracted enough notice to gain political support in very high places.

*The Reagan/Watt era.* In 1980 presidential candidate Ronald Reagan proclaimed: "Count me in as a [Sagebrush] rebel!" (Cawley 1993:2). With the election of Reagan, the Sagebrush Rebels thought they had an ally. Reagan "rewarded his sizeable core of western supporters by selecting James Watt as the new interior secretary.... [Watt was] determined to reverse the direction of range policy by moving away from the 'environmental excess' of the Carter administration toward a 'good neighbor' policy that placed greater emphasis on the economic health of extractive industries such as ranching" (C. Davis 1997:82). Although it seems this should have worked in the rebels' favor, the issue of land ownership soon became more complicated.

Interest groups in favor of privatization of public lands found in the controversy of the Sagebrush Rebellion a convenient arena to further their own political agenda. This did not work in the rebels' favor, for as E.E. Schattschneider observed, "The greatest hazard to any faction is not a frontal attack by the opposition but a flank attack by bigger, collateral, inconsistent, and irrelevant competitors for the attention and loyalty of the public" (Cawley 1993:124).

Privatization quickly became a popular movement which even the President favored. In his budget proposal, President Reagan suggested selling off public lands to reduce the national budget deficit. James Watt disagreed with him. Why did this apparent team split on this issue? Because "Mr. Watt, a celebrated 'sagebrush rebel,' believes in public land ownership—but at the state, rather than at the federal, level" (Cawley 1993:123). In other words, while many people did not want federal ownership of public lands, factions could not agree on whether states or private entities should have control instead.

*Finally "fed" up.* One of the issues central to the premise of abjuring federal ownership is trust. Movements have arisen advocating state, county, local, and private ownership of the public domain because people did not trust the federal government to manage lands for the benefit of the people. The Sagebrush Rebellion fizzled out because of a lack of support in the general public. The rebels really only wanted land management *changes*, but used the states' rights argument to gain support. It did not pan out; there were too many flank attacks, and the rebellion soon faded. Also, the general public's values began to shift. As less and less wilderness remained untrammelled, as more resources suffered from overuse and general degradation, some people began to place more value on the ecological resources of the public domain. Environmentalists too, still see the value in private ownership, and display a lack of trust in the federal government, such as when organizations like the Nature Conservancy buy large parcels of public and private land to be privately managed primarily for ecological benefit.

Distrust in the federal government is not directly correlated to an advocacy for, and therefore trust in, state, county or local governments. Krannich and Smith (1998) studied several rural western towns and found that residents generally believe that federal land managers exert too much control, fail to consider local concerns, and have different values than the residents. They tended to express a preference for state or local land management. However, they also found a

higher than expected level of trust in federal agencies, and low levels of trust in state or county governments to make resource decisions.

"Sagebrush rebels were willing to set aside conveyance in favor of less dramatic policy adjustments. Indeed, the root complaint raised by public land-users during the 1970s was that federal land managers consistently interpreted federal management policies as a call for environmental protection" (Cawley 1993:113). The rebellion was a battle of rhetoric because the Sagebrush Rebels felt they needed to attract attention in order to be heard. They felt that environmentalists dominated federal land policy discussions, that the environmental community's influence created an underlying bias in federal land management decisions, and finally, that the only way to counteract increasing land management restrictions was to precipitate an open conflict (Cawley 1993).

*County rights movement.* The issues raised by the initial Sagebrush Rebellion have not died. In fact, Sandra Davis (1997) mentions four or five sagebrush rebellions. The latest rebellion, which is focused primarily on county rights, is often termed "Son of Sage."

The county rights movement is related to the Sagebrush Rebellion. It is a rebellion against the very same environmental regulations that spurred the sagebrush rebels to speak out. The county movement has the same core premise as the Sagebrush Rebellion, which is control over natural resources. However, it has become more complicated as its supporters have diversified and are pursuing multi-level legal and political avenues of advocacy and legitimization. The county movement is based on the same set of historical and political events that led to the Sagebrush Rebellion. There have been few major policy changes affecting public land management since the time of the original Sagebrush Rebellion, certainly nothing akin to the "environmental decade" of the 1970s. At the heart of the county rights movement is a desire for recognition manifested through policy or sympathetic management. Since the federal

government did not do this, it seemed logical to advocate state or county ownership, or if not ownership, at least control.

The county rights movement is a rhetorical battle over resource control. It is entirely political, so much as land management in general is political. The roots of the county rights movement are seeded in the history of western land management in the U.S. and are inextricably tied to political agendas.

*Catron County.* Catron County escaped none of the events and processes that have characterized the growth of public domain resource development in the west. Catron County is rich in natural resources; around the turn of the century numerous gold and silver mines produced the majority of New Mexico's gold and silver, enough timber existed to support 25 sawmills, and grassy plains fed thousands of cattle. Today, approaching another turn of the century, almost all of the mines and sawmills in Catron County have shut down. The future of cattle grazing on public lands is tenuous. While some ranchers have voluntarily decreased the number of cattle on their allotments, others have been forced to do so as a result of land degradation and permit reductions. Indeed the old growth is scarce and the grasslands often depleted, but reductions in resource extraction and use are also a result of a growing environmental movement.

Currently, the situation in and around Catron County is characterized by an intense, outspoken, emotional conflict of interests. There are those who simply cannot afford to reduce their cattle numbers, those who are fighting for the culture and custom of ranching, and those who find this situation a convenient arena to advocate local resource control. The most active, most extreme advocates tend to take control of the rhetorical and litigious battles, creating a heated forum which polarizes the spectrum of interests and opinions involved in the issues.

Strong opinions about grazing and land management in the county often stem from deep-rooted values about the social legitimacy of cattle grazing and the use, rather than preservation, of natural resources. The modern history of Catron County began with strong, independent types

who settled in the area, far from civilized centers. Apache raids were not uncommon. Mining and ranching were the principal occupations in the late 1800s, and outlaws such as Billy the Kid and Butch Cassidy are prominent figures of Catron County history. Logging and milling also grew to be prosperous trades in the county and the supply of timber, along with grass, seemed endless.

Now the Forest Service manages much of the land on which those seemingly endless resources were located. In fact less than 20 percent of the land in Catron County is privately owned. Even though Catron County is the largest county in New Mexico it is the least populated (see map, Appendix B). Although ranching, logging and mining are rapidly decreasing, the culture of those trades lingers into the social and political arenas of the county. Catron County emerged as a leader in the county rights movement, leaving little doubt that the history of the west remains an important part of Catron County land management politics today.

### CHAPTER III

#### CONTEMPORARY POLITICAL AND LEGAL CONTEXT

Several laws and events are crucial to the social dynamics of Catron County. The purpose of this section is to outline these laws and events, and to explain their purpose at least in terms of their relevance to Catron County.

##### *Endangered Species Act*

The Endangered Species Act (ESA) was passed in 1973 for the purpose of legally protecting and conserving endangered species and threatened species, utilizing the means of federal departments and agencies. Two major functions of the ESA merit mention here. The listing of species as threatened or endangered requires the examination of scientific information, without regard to social or economic considerations. Species are deemed threatened or endangered based solely on available biological data. However, the factors for designation of critical habitat for listed species, that is, habitat which is occupied by the species and/or considered essential to the conservation of the species, must include economic and social components.

The symbolic beginning of land and resource controversy in Catron County is the listing of the Mexican spotted owl, which represents the major introduction of the Endangered Species Act (ESA) to the area. Other endangered species, such as the spikedace and loach minnow, and more recently, the willow flycatcher, are also subjects of ESA regulations and ensuing lawsuits in the county.

##### *National Environmental Policy Act*

In 1969 the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) was passed as a measure for examining "major federal actions significantly affecting the quality of the human environment." NEPA is procedural legislation, providing a framework for decision making; it does not require

substantive decisions. The important features of NEPA include the environmental impact statement, and the environmental assessment and categorical exclusion alternatives, and the formation of the Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ). Most of the specific regulations concerning NEPA come from the CEQ. The Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) is a function of NEPA which requires social, economic, biological and other examinations of a variety of alternative actions including no action. The Environmental Assessment (EA) is a similar though less rigorous study. National regulations now require NEPA assessments, generally EAs, on all national forest grazing allotment permit renewals.

In 1996 the Tenth Circuit court ruled in favor of Catron County in *Catron County Board of Commissioners v. United States Fish and Wildlife Service*, requiring compliance with the NEPA, when designating critical habitat for endangered or threatened species (J. Davis 1997). Although ESA requires social and economic considerations for the designation of critical habitat, this ruling states that "without NEPA's decisionmaking framework, the full realm of environmental effects issuing from critical habitat designations, as well as possible alternatives to the designations, might remain unknown" (J. Davis 1997:689). As a result, the USFWS was required to write an environmental impact statement before designating critical habitat for the spikedace and loach minnow, two species of fish inhabiting the Gila River.

Although environmentalists are often targeted as using legal manipulation tactics, this case is proof positive that procedural environmental legislation can be, and had been, used by a variety of interest groups for diverse reasons. In this case, the county gained a social assessment hoping that social considerations would result in less land-use regulations.

### *Spotted Owl Controversy*

In northwest states like Washington and Oregon, the northern spotted owl received national attention as the culprit of timber industry job losses. According to Freudenburg et al.

(1998), the listing of the spotted owl as an endangered species had no significant effect on employment:

Both nationally and in the Pacific Northwest, the greatest decline in timber employment occurred from 1947 until 1964 - a time of great economic growth, a general absence of "unreasonable environmental regulations," and growing timber harvests. The period since the passage of the Wilderness Act [1964] has been one of increased complaints about environmental constraints, but much less decline in U. S. logging employment. (p.1)

A relative to the northern spotted owl, the Mexican spotted owl, lives in the southwest including Catron County. In the 1980s environmental groups pressured the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to list the Mexican spotted owl as an endangered species, thereby also requiring protection of the owl's habitat. The listing of the Mexican spotted owl as an endangered species contributed to reductions in proposed logging on parts of the southwest's National Forests. Contrary to many claims made by residents, the listing did not *cause* but did magnify an economic decline in Catron County. Many witnesses of that era are determined to prevent a similar fate for public lands ranching. As the local Chamber of Commerce explains, "the area is supported, mostly by ranching, milling, mining, logging, and Forest Service activity. However, most of the logging, milling, and mining has been shut down due to the results of the Endangered Species Act" (Southern Catron County Chamber of Commerce).

Although endangered species are managed by the U. S. Department of the Interior Fish and Wildlife Service, it was the Forest Service that shouldered much of the blame over the results of the spotted owl listing. The Forest Service rewrote the Forest Plan at that time, accommodating spotted owl requirements and moving slightly away from commodity production as the driving value of National Forest lands. Also, the Fish and Wildlife Service is not a physical presence in Catron County, so complaints about them and other federal agencies are usually fielded by the local Forest Service.



### *Catron County Comprehensive Land Plan*

An early Catron County response to federal government intervention in land and resource management, especially the use of ESA to protect the spotted owl and spotted owl habitat in Catron County, was the drafting of what was to become a nationally renowned document, the Catron County Comprehensive Land Plan. The plan was an effort to reestablish the county as an entity largely autonomous from the federal government, and to gain support for local land management control.

Grigsby (1980) has said that societies draw attention to their uniqueness. In the case of Catron County, the commissioners decided the only way to preserve the county from what they considered to be increasingly destructive forces of federal land management regulations was to define and record the unique custom and culture of the county and enforce its protection. The county drafted a controversial and widely renowned land plan which included several distinct ordinances.

The new ordinances and land-use plans attempt to weaken the Endangered Species Act, the Clean Water Act, the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act, the Wilderness Act, and the National Forest Management Act by stating that local governments must approve all federal actions in their counties. Codes create criminal sanction for federal officials who violate county demands. For example, forest rangers in Catron County, and now elsewhere, can be arrested for "arbitrarily" reducing a rancher's cattle on public land. (Williams 1995:130)

The ordinances were established because environmental regulations were viewed as unnecessary and obstructive. Many locals could not see the use of such regulations. Catron County, said one resident rancher who was also a county commissioner, "was the most peaceful place on earth, it didn't matter how much money you made. Nobody bothered you. You didn't have the Army Corps of Engineers getting after you about the river. You had no Endangered Species Act. You had a very good life, free of regulation" (Davis 1996:1).

Ironically, the legal basis of this community protection idea was found in the National Environmental Policy Act. NEPA requires federal agencies to “preserve important historic, cultural, and natural aspects of our national heritage, and maintain, wherever possible, an environment which supports diversity and variety of individual choice” (NEPA: Sec 4331(b)(4)). The “custom and culture” that some citizens of Catron County are trying to protect is the ranching and resource extraction way of life. “Custom and culture was simply a way to secure control of public lands for a small minority of citizens engaged in ranching, logging, and mining” (Hess<sup>3</sup> quoted in Dowie 1995:66). A non-rancher in Catron County explains, “The commissioners, the sheriffs, the people working at the county clerk’s office, they’re mostly ranchers. People are afraid to buck them. They control jobs, the schools—you name it. They’ve got a conspiracy type of deal. But they know it’s coming to an end. That’s why they’re desperate” (Jones 1996:1).

The culture that the writers of this document perceived as threatened by federal agents is a land-use-based lifestyle. In order to preserve this lifestyle, the county land plan attempted to describe it and enforce its protection. “Our constitution as we know it is being arbitrarily and capriciously changed through policies and regulations, if you don’t lock your custom and culture into law, you’re through, you’re history” (Williams 1995:135).

The cover illustration of the comprehensive land-use plan clearly implies a definition of multiple use as ranching, mining, recreation (illustration of hunting) and timber. The legal definition according to the Multiple Use-Sustained Yield act of 1960 includes outdoor recreation, range, timber, watershed, and wildlife and fish purposes. Although it leaves plenty of room for interpretation, the act is explicit in its definition of multiple use:

The management of all the various renewable surface resources of the national forests so that they are utilized in the combination that will best meet the needs of the American people; making the most judicious use of the land for

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<sup>3</sup> Karl Hess was hired by Catron County to help compose the Comprehensive Land Plan, which included ordinances. Hess later disassociated himself with the project and the county.

some or all of these resources or related services over areas large enough to provide sufficient latitude for periodic adjustments in use to conform to changing needs and conditions; that some land will be used for less than all of the resources; and harmonious and coordinated management of the various resources, each with the other, without impairment of the productivity of the land, with consideration being given to the relative values of the various resources, and not necessarily the combination of uses that will give the greatest dollar return or the greatest unit output. (Sec. 531 (a))

The domination of one or a couple of resource uses is not prohibited by the Act, but it is a source of questioning in Catron County, as timber and grazing are reduced in order to give more service to recreation and wildlife uses of the land. Supporters of the county land plan maintain that their definition of multiple use supports the custom and culture of the county, and thus implies an important historical benefit.

In addition to the ordinances mentioned above, the land plan includes an ordinance prohibiting the release of certain endangered species, and an ordinance declaring the authority of the Catron County board of commissioners as a land management agency. The commissioners were interested in playing a part in land management decisions in the county in order to reduce the number of overt decisions causing detrimental effects on specific uses of the land, namely ranching, logging, and mining. The land-use plan was written in response to the spotted owl events which contributed to reduced logging, jobs, and county income. The county felt that the federal government did not consider the lives and livelihoods of people in Catron County when making decisions to protect spotted owl habitat by reducing timber sales. The county, therefore, concerned about future land management decisions and effects on other land-use occupations, drafted the first "Catron County style" land plan and declared county supremacy on certain land management decisions. Chapter two in the plan describes the culture and custom of Catron County and includes the following sections:

- The custom of livestock grazing in Catron County**
- The custom of mining in Catron County**
- The custom of timbering in Catron County**
- The importance of custom and culture in defining community stability.**

This makes it quite obvious that custom and culture is defined in this case as ranching, mining and logging. Although these traditions are of course important to the county, they define only a segment of the custom and culture of Catron County. Despite its flaws, the land plan and the ordinances succeeded in providing standing to local values, often with the use of strong language such as in this excerpt:

Federal and state agents threaten the life, liberty, and happiness of the people of Catron County. They present a clear and present danger to the land and livelihood of every man, woman, and child. A state of emergency prevails that calls for devotion and sacrifice. It asks that the citizens of Catron County unite themselves and, through their elected government, assert their fundamental rights to human dignity and self-government. Most of all, it seeks from an honorable past the strength to mold an environment of freedom and opportunity for Catron County's present and future generations. (p. vii)

The ordinances called immediate attention to the otherwise unknown county. A proud resident of Catron County recalled, "Within 24 hours, Washington, D.C.. knew where Catron County was" (Williams 1995:130). Catron County is often considered the instigator of the county rights movement across the western United States. The political attention and the power of the ordinances encouraged several other counties across the west to adopt similar plans or, sometimes, replicas of Catron County's plan. In fact, the National Federal Lands Conference, headquartered in Bountiful, Utah, sells copies of Catron County's land-use plan for \$257.50 each. With Catron County's land plan, and with many other counties following its lead, a new perspective has been displayed. Although the ordinances do not seem to hold up in court, they do provide for a greater awareness amongst agency personnel.

According to Greider (1997) the county rights movement is about rural westerners' efforts to protect the uncertain futures of their autonomous communities.

These are local people coming together to try to reclaim their communities and the surrounding territories in which they live.... They represent a much greater force than the Sagebrush Rebellion of the 1970s because they represent the revival of local community....(p.2)

However, observes Jim Baca, the county rights movement "is an illegitimate expression of legitimate fears among rural westerners about their uncertain future" (Dowie 1995:64). Just like

the Sagebrush Rebellion, the county rights movement represents a legally questionable but symbolically powerful message.

*Memorandum of Understanding Between the Forest Service and the Catron County Commission*

Several years ago the county government wrote to the Forest Service regional office to complain of uncooperative attitudes from the Gila National Forest supervisor's office and one of the local district offices. Subsequently, at the request of the Gila Forest Supervisor, a three-person team from the Regional office investigated the situation. Their report found that the county government felt the NEPA process did not provide adequate representation. The county wanted more direct, personal, and informal communication with the local Forest Service as well as specific invitations to participate in planning. The regional team also found that because of a lack of a regional Forest Service contact, the local district often took criticism for the Agency on regional and national issues. Forest Service employees told the team that ordinances passed by the county concerning federal agencies worried them and hindered constructive communication.

The team recommended defining specific points of contact, and the development of a memorandum of understanding (MOU) between the Forest Service and the county. The MOU was signed on 15 February 1994. Its purpose was to "establish a mutually harmonious and productive planning relationship between the county and the Forest." The MOU recognized the Forest Service as the primary manager of national forest lands, and outlined several ways in which the county would be included, consulted, or considered in land management planning. However, the MOU did not state that the county has any specific authority of land management on national forest lands.

The MOU dissolved in 1998. Residents speculated several reasons for the dissolution, including the county's request for more decision-making power, and the increased tension between the county and the Forest Service due to the Tucson litigation that is described below. Also, it was suggested that the MOU represented too much to withstand the pressure of

reconciliation because Catron County was a pilot for the county rights movement, and as such, was not in a position to compromise.

### *The Tucson Lawsuit*

Although impacts of the ESA and the NEPA assessments have stirred up debate, and caused a great deal of stress, another recent and major impact on grazing management practices in Catron County has added even greater tension to the already volatile mix of ranchers, environmentalists, and federal agencies. This event was a lawsuit brought against the Forest Service in April 1995 by two environmental groups.

The Southwest Center for Biological Diversity and Forest Guardians filed suit against the Forest Service alleging noncompliance with the ESA on 160 grazing allotments. The lawsuit went to the U.S. district court in Tucson, and the Arizona and New Mexico Cattlegrowers Associations intervened. The environmental groups wanted an injunction on cattle grazing in riparian areas in order to study the effects of grazing on several endangered species: the loach minnow, spinedace, razorback sucker, pygmy owl, southwest willow flycatcher, and the sonoran chub. The lawsuit resulted in a private settlement just before going to trial; all parties involved had gathered at the courthouse. In order to avoid an injunction, the Forest Service reported, they settled with the environmental groups, agreeing to fence cows out of several riparian areas, but not to remove cows from the forest. Ranchers say the Forest Service could have won the case, instead they "threw the case" and ceded to environmental demands. The Forest Service maintains that the agreement merely formalized management plans that were already in process. These differing perspectives created very high levels of tension in the county, and served to further polarize the ranchers, environmentalists, and the Forest Service.

## CHAPTER IV

### RESEARCH METHODS

This research is based on a case study in Catron County, New Mexico. While some information was drawn from a variety of available data sources, the research effort was largely based on in-depth, face-to-face interviews in Catron County. The case study approach was chosen for the advantage of close observation of a reactive issue in this precedent-setting county.

#### *Selection of Interview Subjects*

My initial contact in Catron County was with the Glenwood Ranger District of the Forest Service. Interviews were conducted with the District Ranger and range conservationists at the Glenwood station. This was one of two starting points for locating informants. The other starting base was a Catron County Livestock Committee meeting. At this meeting I approached one of the leaders of the meeting to set up an interview. I was introduced to others who were interested in being interviewed about grazing management in the county. Other local residents were identified through a snowball sampling process. Each interviewee provided names of other residents who they thought might have been willing to agree to an interview. This process continued until I began receiving redundant information, and no new information, from many sources. I asked each interviewee to provide names of people who agreed and disagreed with his or her views. As the snowball process continued, I included or eliminated potential informants from my sample by considering occupation, place of residence, and attitude toward grazing, based on information supplied by the provider or providers of the name of the potential informant. In this manner I worked toward interviewing a range of people representing a variety of perspectives.

Both stakeholders and key informants were interviewed. Stakeholders are defined as people who have direct interest (vested or otherwise) in Catron County's public grazing lands.

These interviews are important for their content in terms of the perspectives of the people whose interests the Forest Service will need to incorporate into their management decisions. Key informants have a wealth of knowledge about the area, the people, and the Forest Service. Stakeholders and key informants are not mutually exclusive, meaning an interviewee may fit into both categories.

Of those interviewed approximately 35% included ranchers, 10% environmentalists, 30% business owners, 15% long-term residents, and 10% new residents. Interviews with personnel from other resource management agencies, namely the Bureau of Land Management and the New Mexico Game and Fish Department, were also conducted.

#### *Contact and Approach*

Interviewees were initially contacted via telephone. Each was informed of my name, my affiliation with Utah State University, the purpose of my project, and from whom I had secured reference to their names. They were asked to consent to a personal interview and to set up a convenient appointment. There were several people with whom contact was not established, but only two refusals to participate. Driving time to and from each interview was often substantial, and actual interview length ranged from about one to three hours. Most were conducted in the interviewees' homes, which were located throughout the county.

Interviews followed a semi-structured protocol (Appendix A), which was intended to direct questioning toward several primary topics including grazing issues, Forest Service management, and local communities. Questions were asked to solicit information on the social structure of the local community in which the respondent lives, as well the social structure of Catron County. Respondents were asked how these social structures may have changed or are changing and whether that is perceived as positive or negative.

Questions about the Forest Service attempted to discover how residents of Catron County feel about federal land management practices and the condition of grazing resources on those



lands. This included the ecological health of the grazing lands, and the efforts of the Forest Service to include local concerns in grazing lands management decisions. Information about relationships between the Forest Service and agency personnel and residents of Catron County was also requested. Questions concerning ranching and grazing were asked, including the extent to which ranching is an economic pursuit and how important it is to the county. Additionally, the merits of the most recent lawsuits involving Catron County and the Forest Service were discussed at length.

This type of semi-structured interview allows the researcher to provide a framework for the interview while still allowing the respondent freedom to discuss salient issues according to his or her prioritization. Other types of interviews ask specific questions requiring short answers. Qualitative interviews may include open-ended questions which allow the interviewee to elaborate on his or her opinions. In addition, the researcher may probe the respondent for further explanations of a particular response, and interviewees often interject with other relevant information about which the interviewer did not question.

#### *Data Recording and Organizing*

Overall, 36 interviews were conducted during the month of July 1998. The handwritten notes from these interviews were typed within one day of the interview. On a few occasions, a tape recorder was used to record the interview in situations where more than one person was being interviewed, or the interviewee spoke rapidly. These interviews were transcribed from audio tape. The data were coded according to recurring themes and categories in the interview notes (Strauss and Corbin 1990). Several waves of organization were required in order to filter the information into useful and relevant groups.

Data also came from a number of public meetings including a county commissioner's meeting, citizens group meetings, Forest Service meetings, cattlegrowers' meetings, two public demonstrations, and the County 4<sup>th</sup> of July barbecue and dance. These meetings attracted various

groups of people, and provided an alternative view of the people of Catron County that supplemented information derived from personal interviews. Pertinent observations of these meetings were recorded.

Additionally, published information was collected in order to fill in some of the details about the Forest Service's goals, management efforts, and public responses. This included Forest Service documents pertaining to grazing management and human dimensions considerations, which were photocopied with permission.

#### *Advantages and Disadvantages*

There are numerous advantages and disadvantages to conducting qualitative research. Qualitative and quantitative research are not mutually exclusive, but on the contrary complement each other quite well. The financial and temporal limitations of this particular project were suited to a qualitative approach, but in no way preclude further research, both qualitative and quantitative, in order to broaden this knowledge across both time and space. The advantage of a qualitative method in this case is the depth of accessible detail, which is important on a complicated issue such as this research is examining (Stake 1995). Because there are no black-and-white answers, qualitative interviews allow informants to paint in shades of gray, and explain the nuances of the situation. Often a disadvantage in qualitative studies is the lack of a broader application to other settings. Indeed, this research is specific to certain conditions present in Catron County in 1998. Nevertheless, the findings here should provide some useful insights for studies of other areas where similar circumstances are arising.

#### *Discussion of Results*

The findings from this research are presented in two chapters, both illustrated with quotes from the residents of Catron County. Chapter V discusses residents' responses to the social and political dynamics of the county, changes as a result of these dynamics, and the social groups

involved in the political context. Chapter VI focuses on the Forest Service in Catron County, responses to Forest Service management, and challenges faced by the Forest Service. A discussion of social science efforts by the Forest Service concludes the body of the paper.

## CHAPTER V

### COMMUNITY RESPONSE

#### *Change in Catron County*

Change that was marked by the spotted owl situation and continues with grazing controversies is influencing, and is influenced by, changing public values. With more newcomers to Catron County, many people do not feel as comfortable as they once did, and I would venture, do not trust as readily as they once did. This, in addition to the rapid and myriad changes within the Forest Service, has left residents feeling isolated and left out of the political process. Changes must occur slowly in order to be agreeably digested by people. Quotes by residents during the oral interviews add color and clarity to these changes, such as the following example:

*"It used to be like one big family here, now there are so many new people, it's not so comfortable."* (Catron County rancher)

While change in Catron County is not new, the pace of recent changes occurring in several spheres of life in Catron County is overwhelming to many folks. A few people explicitly remarked on the insane and unnecessary speed with which land management alterations were enforced. Adjusting to societal change can be a frightening prospect for people who fear their traditional way of life will not survive. Slow changes allow for adjustments consistent with changes in lifestyle, society, politics, and economics. But rapid change often implies a one-way road to a modern future, leaving traditional lifestyles by the wayside.

Gusfield (1967) asserted that the assumed polarity of tradition and modernity is unfounded. According to Gusfield, it is often felt that existing "traditional" institutions and values are impediments to modernization. But this is not necessarily true because there are many ways in which old and new aspects of social, economic and political life can blend together. According to Gusfield, the myths about societal change include: traditional societies are static and have always existed in their current form; traditional societies have always had consistent

values; traditional societies are homogenous. Perhaps these assumptions are made on the basis that change in traditional societies has been slow, and therefore more difficult to measure. Other myths are: traditions are displaced by new changes; the old and new are mutually exclusive and thus are always in conflict, the result being the weakening of tradition by modernizing processes. The impression of these latter myths occurring in Catron County has worried many of the people who consider themselves living the traditional way of life. These are the primary stock raisers for whom the past serves as political legitimation and support of their values. The fact that several generations of their families have been doing the same thing in the same place for many years is viewed as a sound reason for continuing things the same way in the future. They do not want to compromise, to change the way they are doing things, because they are afraid their traditional ways will get the short end of the deal, and will be weakened by the new processes of management. The polar opposite view embraced by extreme environmentalists is to completely remove cattle grazing from the national forests. But the people of Catron County whose opinions fall somewhere in the middle, who see the possibility of blending old and new, suggest that cattle grazing should continue on the national forests but should be tailored to allow for other public values on national land.

The Forest Service in Catron County must consider the values of all of these stakeholders when making grazing management decisions. The diversity and strength of opinions on land management issues make this task difficult. The tug of war between ranchers, who favor traditional grazing management, and the Forest Service, which is trying to respond to stakeholders who want different forms of grazing management, has created strife throughout the county.

#### *Laws and Lawsuits*

The ESA and NEPA supply the legal basis for controversy in Catron County. These federal regulations are, to many residents of the county, an intrusion. The stipulations of the ESA

and NEPA often require specific management agendas on public lands, thus inspiring an atmosphere of tight federal agency control of lands and resources. Now with public grazing lands in the spotlight, environmentalists have brought lawsuits endeavoring to protect endangered species, and requiring reductions of cattle numbers, especially in riparian areas. And again, the Forest Service must implement change, and inform ranchers who have grazing permits on certain areas of the forest that they will be required to reduce their cattle numbers. Many people in Catron County feel the county has lost control and decision-making rights over land and resources in the county as a result of the regulations imposed by the federal government under the ESA and NEPA. Also, as illustrated in the following quotations from residents of Catron County, many feel that the environmental legislation is a convenient ruse for political power.

*"Bastiat observed that government only does one thing; grow. It's not an environmental struggle but a political one."* (Catron County environmentalist)

*"It was a folly of Congress in creating environmental planning laws. Decisions are really political."* (advocate of local-control)

*"If there's one thing that I want you to remember that I said, it's that this has absolutely nothing to do with the environment. It has to do with power and control of the land."* (newcomer)

The judicial system has been used successfully by environmental groups, but also by Catron County, to gain control over land management. The lawsuit strategy is certainly a political maneuver because most cases deal with process, not decisions. Processes for land management considerations are quite explicit in the ESA and in NEPA. The Tucson case illustrated the political nature of the grazing debate in Catron County. The following quotes exemplify a spectrum of opinions on the political nature of the lawsuit situation, including the distinction between ranchers, environmentalists and the Forest Service,

*"There's a lot of miscommunication of the Forest Service and ranchers, cattle people. Also there's miscommunication with environmental groups because they perceived a victory and went to the media."* (Forest Service employee)

*"The Forest Service is a big organization and there are many good people who believe in ranching and think what is going on is wrong."* (newcomers sympathetic to ranchers)

*"Ranchers think the Forest Service is acting contrary to their interest because a lot of stupid decisions come out of the Forest Service. One of the problems that the Forest Service has is that there a lot people making decisions that don't know anything about ranching."* (newcomer)

*"Gore and Clinton don't know anything about range science."* (rancher)

*"The environmentalists have done a lot of good, especially when you see crowding in other parts of the country. But they have gone too far, they are being bullies. You have to have perspective on that too."* (newcomer, retiree)

*"Local political clout, the ranchers, they have lots. Senators Domenici and Skeen are doing stupid shit for them, the hearing, bullshit. The Forest Service is finally doing their job after 100 years. If they'd been doing it, their job, this wouldn't have happened."* (longtime resident)

This particular lawsuit has drawn much attention to the current grazing situation as managed by the Forest Service, the historical trends of grazing in the area, and to the diversity of perspectives on grazing land management. It has pitted traditional groups against each other in a new wave of controversy. As Riebsame and Woodmansee (1995) put it, "Like many environmental debates, the grazing battle is driven by fundamentally divergent views of the "correct" relationship between environment and society" (p. 71). In Catron County, the recent litigious battles have exacerbated the social dynamics which created sharp contrasts between ranchers and environmentalists, and have forged a precarious position for the Forest Service and its employees.

Another recent effort to solidify responsible grazing management practices, was the decision to require NEPA analyses on grazing allotment permit renewals. Many ranchers claim NEPA is not required on grazing permit renewals because there is no change in action.

*"The purpose for NEPA is for any change. The ten-year grazing lease renewal is an interpretation, it is not a change. These are guidelines we can't live with. And the law doesn't say that."* (rancher)

In related circumstances, tried in *Feller v. Bureau of Land Management*, the court found that the renewal of a grazing permit was a major federal agency action which does "significantly affect the human environment" and therefore requires an assessment according to NEPA regulations. However, the Forest Service is now faced with so many permit renewals, which

require NEPA processing and paperwork, that they feel stressed and overworked. The pace of data collection and management decision-making is very fast; many have described it as insane.

*"Why 33 allotments in x months? Deadlines. C'mon, we're talking about lifestyles. Decisions take hold too fast. The problem is so old and you can take time fixing it.... Slow the pace. Data collection is too fast, they are rushing and making mistakes. If it's slower it puts everything more in line."* (forestry consultant)

*"Human element is being left out. NEPA is going too fast, everything is too fast."* (longtime resident)

*"More time doing paperwork because of NEPA... We have to do a certain number of allotments in a given time. Then monitoring, write-ups and reporting. It's an arbitrary date, it all is."* (Forest Service employee)

*"We don't have time to do the best science."* (Forest Service employee)

Also, the Forest Service is relegated to playing a game of catch-up instead of focusing on stewardship for the future. Most of the residents of Catron County recognize this, and Forest Service employees, too, are frustrated. The decision to apply NEPA assessments to the grazing lease renewals prompted one Forest Service employee to compare the situation to the job of disciplining a 17-year-old child, after 16 years without any discipline. Overall, while the idea of environmental regulations is well intended, the process of enforcement is causing a swell of tension in Catron County. The pace of change and the politically fickle nature of that change is disconcerting. Residents of Catron County are witnessing the red tape of environmental legislation and many are discouraged:

*"Environmental laws didn't solve any of the problems for which they were created, they just created another administrative layer. Procedure is now more important than form and function."* (advocate of local-control)

*"NEPA, ESA, Multiple-Use, they created a shift in the Forest Service to administrative, away from land management on the ground."* (rancher)

Many long-time residents of Catron County are sure that life was better before environmental regulations came to pass. Although the Forest Service should be aware of the multitude of opinions in Catron County, they must also abide by the law and follow environmental directives.



### *Characteristics of Catron County*

The small town atmosphere of Catron County contributes to a relatively closed system of insiders and outsiders. Several people commented on the closed structure of the community, including heavy stereotyping, along with differential treatment of those defined as "outsiders," who may be newcomers, environmentalists, or Forest Service employees.

Of course, there used to be a lot more long-term residents than newcomers. Now, Catron County has a veritable stream of newcomers filling in the few pockets of private land. As one resident noted, the residents of the town of Glenwood in 1988 were listed on one telephone book page. In 10 years that number has risen to one page and a half. This rate of growth is unprecedented in the area. Real estate and construction are booming businesses. Many newcomers live in the newly developed subdivisions, often situated on land sold off by financially strapped ranchers. According to residents, the newcomers are usually retirees. This is likely due to the low employment opportunities in Catron County and the low growth of businesses; census statistics in 1992 show a total of 56 businesses in this Connecticut-sized county, by 1995 there were 58 businesses.

Observations, lack of interview referrals, and informant data suggest that newcomers tend to keep to themselves and avoid local politics. However, observation proved that a few active outsiders were firmly involved in the heated land management battles. And while it appears that the majority of newcomers tend to keep to themselves, they do vote. The current three-man county commission has close ties to the ranching and logging industries, but their seats were not as easily won in 1998 as in past years. Many subdivision residents are more interested in obtaining county services than arguing with the Forest Service. As a 5-year resident of the county explained:

*"There has been change. The make-up of people is changing, it's growing, a lot of retirees. They didn't come to get involved in local politics. But eventually the county will need to focus on roads, landfills, etc. instead of lawsuits....The county will have to raise taxes when they realize they need to make changes and they don't have any money left. It will blow up on them*

*and they won't be able to think about those 14 [ranchers]. County people will want services that the county is supposed to provide. There is no forward thinking. Everything about the county commission is fighting change."*

Other newcomers agreed:

*"Custom, culture, and tradition, that's what they call it. People who moved in don't care. Their attitude is we don't care what you do the forest, just don't cut the trees in my backyard or let the cows get on my property."*

*"[The long-term residents] are accustomed to determining everything. They don't like it if you disagree with them."*

In fact when a 6-year resident of the county decided to run for the school board against a long-term resident:

*"The old family was irate that a newcomer was running against him. It does keep people from speaking out."*

Forest Service employees are often considered outsiders. Long-term residents who are also ranchers said this about the annual 4<sup>th</sup> of July fireworks gathering, an example of the demographic changes in the county:

*"We saw one or two people we knew, and the rest were Forest Service and people we didn't know; we didn't feel comfortable."*

These ranchers categorized the crowd into three distinct genres: people they knew, people they did not know, and the Forest Service (people they would rather not know?). This puts the Forest Service into a strange middle ground, which will be discussed in greater detail in the next section.

Despite their differences, ranchers, environmentalists, and Forest Service employees have the commonality of being Caucasian. I was never referred to anyone of Hispanic origin within the county. Although approximately 28 percent of the population of the county, according to census statistics, claims Hispanic origin, the rangeland debate is what one businessman called "white male anger."

In place of racial overtones, stereotyping generally concerned the main interest groups of the county, including ranchers, environmentalists and the Forest Service:

*"It's going to be years. We are not dealing with anything simple. I don't see the light at the end of the tunnel. I hope I can remain comfortable in this community and my children too. We have a long way to go because the stereotypes are so thick and heavy."* (Catron County environmentalist)

One particular anecdote illustrates the pervasiveness of stereotypes and the difficulty of living with them. A particular Forest Service employee said he took his children out of the school system and began homeschooling because of "things that have gone on." The specific example he gave occurred around 4 years ago. It was an essay children in school wrote to New Mexico Senator Skeen. Allegedly, the given topic of the essay was something to the effect of "What the Forest Service Has Done to My Parents." Homeschooling is common in the county due to such value differences and stereotyping.

While a minority of people in Catron County are actually ranchers, the relationship between the cattle industry and the Forest Service affects the whole community. This is due in part to the county commissioners' ties to ranching (two of the three are from ranching families) and also to the nature of a small community. The geography of the county, while physically spacious, is conducive to a small town atmosphere, an amalgam of the few villages within it. The result is a few distinct characteristics which shape the context of the rangelands debate.

Despite the physical size of the county, as a whole it retains the flavor of a small community. It is technologically isolated from the outside world, but is almost too small on the inside, as the following quotes attest:

*"Here there is limited external communication. There is no county newspaper, the radio and the TV sometimes they don't come in very well. It is isolated, most things travel by word of mouth."* (Forest Service employee)

*"Rumors are great here, people believe their neighbors without checking the facts. They pass it on and believe each other."* (newcomer)

*"Here there is no anonymity. You see it all. There is no hiding who is doing what. You can't hide, you can't have secrets. That is uncomfortable for some people."* (environmentalist)

Despite the idiosyncrasies of Catron County, people come and they stay, usually because of the landscape.

*"I stay because I am in love with the land." (20-year resident)*

The amenities of fresh air, clean water, open spaces, and gorgeous scenery are immediately obvious. But other reasons inspired people to stay in Catron County. One commonly cited reason is the lifestyle and the values that go along with it. When not involved in heated political feuds, the people of Catron County exhibit hospitality, and friendliness; most people wave on the roads to strangers and friends alike (especially if you drive a truck).

*"I like the values out here; a handshake and look you in the eye." (forestry consultant)*

*"Contrary to what we expected, there has been a great western attitude." (businessman)*

This kind of lifestyle is what some will say they are fighting to preserve. An influx of people, changing values, and resulting land management policies are coming fast to Catron County. Lawsuits that have precipitated large-scale land management changes in the county have also exacerbated the social dynamics and have created sharp contrasts between ranchers and environmentalists, and have produced a Scylla and Charybdis situation for the Forest Service and its employees.

### *Social Groups*

Political developments have generated a degree of discord in Catron County out of which has emerged distinct interest groups. The three most important groups currently are labeled as ranchers, environmentalists and the Forest Service.

Catron County has from its beginnings been influenced by cattle interests. The national trend of environmentalism, which prompted a plethora of environmental legislation, was slow in reaching Catron County, but the environmental movement is now fully immersed in the politics of the county. Through the efforts of environmental groups, the Forest Service is complying with environmental regulations, although this is causing animosity between ranchers in the county, and environmentalists both in the county and outside. Ranchers, environmentalists, and the Forest Service in Catron County are affected by the unique social atmosphere of the county, the context

in which they live and work. Several aspects of the sociocultural dynamics of Catron County have contributed to the development of these groups and to the debate over rangeland management.

Social constructionist theory informs us that cultural experience produces unique perspectives of the environment (Greider and Garkovich 1994). There are groups within Catron County that perceive things differently than other groups because of their social surroundings and their relationship to the environment. Often these groups are defined by occupation. Carroll (1995) used the term *occupational community* to describe a group of people who share a “socially constructed reality and beliefs that tend to set them apart from other groups in society” (p. 102). In Catron County, the Forest Service is one of these groups, and ranchers are another. Grigsby (1980) used the term *ranching subculture*. It is obvious that all ranchers do not belong to the same subculture or occupational groups, but the ones who are creating a stir are the ones whose socially constructed reality is furthest from the reality of the Forest Service occupational group, as well as the reality of the environmentalists.

According to Durkheim’s idea of objective reality, “...whatever it takes to ‘conform’ in social order, that activity is equivalent to the very practices that it takes to experience the world correctly (i.e. correctly within that social order)” ( Hilbert 1992:72). Thus, the various interest groups, occupational communities, or subcultures in Catron County feel that their particular means of perceiving the world and participating in it represent the right and acceptable way.

*Ranchers.* The ranchers of Catron County maintain their unique identity and membership in the group through certain practices. “All the hats,” as one Forest Service employee referred to them, meaning, of course, the cowboy-style western hat, “are on each other’s side no matter how they’re doing.” It is interesting that they will support each other on the basis of membership in the group but their social rules dictate complete independence in managing their respective ranches.

A rancher explained:

*"[The lawsuits] brought the ranchers together. But management practices, as far as good or bad, are on your own, you don't meddle."* (rancher)

An important aspect of their lifestyle is independence and self-reliance. It is the lifestyle they love.

*"It's not a way to make a living, it's a way of life."* (rancher)

The independence, the landscape, these things outweigh the economics of cattle ranching, which is often inefficient; "formal economic theory often will not explain many of the decisions made by ranchers" (Grigsby, 1980:93). In fact, said one resident of Catron County:

*"I talked to one rancher who said if he won the lottery it would take him longer to go broke running cattle."* (state employee)

Smith and Martin (1972), in their study of Arizona ranchers, explained this attitude, which they labeled as ranch fundamentalism, as the "attitude that being a cattle rancher leads to a higher state of total well-being than an alternative mode of making a living and way of life could provide" (p. 219).

The value of cattle ranchers in Catron County is not an economic equation. The ranchers are trying to preserve their individual way of life as well as the culture of a community in which cattle ranching has historically been a major contributing factor. A supporter of ranchers explained the paradox of modern cowboys:

*"[They] have been on the land forever, they don't organize, they don't believe in lawsuits, they're as honest as the day is long, some of the finest people this country's ever had, that pursues a lifestyle that this country is supposed to think is the greatest lifestyle in the world and they're being utterly destroyed."* (newcomers)

Smith and Martin (1972) formally explained the importance of ranchers in places like Catron County, "It may be that the impact of ranching on the local economy is to be found more in terms of such dimensions as social stability and community leadership rather than in terms of significant economic benefits" (p. 224).

Ranchers, and non-ranchers alike, realize that their independence can also be detrimental to their cause.

*"Yeah, its brought people together; we have no choice. We want to be left alone, we don't want to go to meetings." (rancher)*

*"Ranchers don't form a cooperative, they have tried, but they don't work well together. They are their own worst enemies." (newcomer)*

*"I think ranchers are really frustrated now. They think they can solve problems by yelling at the Forest Service. They don't quite get it. This attitude can't get through it... the small political power of the rancher is being wasted." (newcomer)*

And, as Grigsby (1980) found of Oregon cattle ranchers, "...if twelve ranchers were at a meeting, there would be twelve different opinions..." (p. 95). In other words, they stick up for each other, but they do not tend to stick together.

While most ranchers in Catron County may display the characteristics outlined above, there is definitely a small group of ranchers, and non-ranchers who nonetheless espouse similar values, and who, through their outspoken disagreements with the Forest Service, environmentalists, and others, have come to be labeled as extremists. They represent one far side of a polarized debate on rangeland management and although many folks agree with them it seems that most are disposed toward a middle ground on rangeland issues. However, these extremists believe they are accurately championing the rights of all ranchers in Catron County.

*"A few people making a lot of noise. [Joe, not his real name] thinks of himself as the poster boy; there are only a few that agree with him." (Forest Service employee)*

Two of the loudest noisemakers, rallying for the ranchers, have no personal stake in the future of public lands grazing in Catron County. For this reason, they are free to be extremists, to fight for all or nothing, and refuse to compromise. One of these two is a relative newcomer to the area but has quickly become involved. Another, who is the chairman of the Catron County Livestock Committee, actually lives outside the Catron County line, and furthermore, runs most of his cattle on deeded lands, not National Forest land. The executive secretary for the New Mexico Cattle Growers Association understands the position of ranchers with a real stake in the issue, and as she pointed out to one of the extremists above, who suggested that the ranchers "just say no" to the Forest Service:

*"But you and I aren't fixin' to lose our lands, our water, our cows, so we need to have alternatives."*

This demonstrates two important aspects of the rancher social structure. First, and most important, the recognition of a need for alternatives to the "just say no" action exhibits a willingness for a manageable settlement to the grazing situation. This possibility provides an open door for the Forest Service to utilize social science tools in finding a solution. Second, there appears to be a split in the rancher group: those that are fighting for principles, and often have the resources to pursue other means of making a living; and those that are fighting to maintain the status quo system which allows them to survive as cattle ranchers. The former have no use for "alternatives" while the latter recognize the necessity of alternative solutions of management as a means of staying in business. Regardless of the source of their dissention, the group as a whole is making a stand against environmental regulations that limit rancher control on rangelands. This unites them against the environmentalists, and the Forest Service.

*Environmentalists.* Environmentalists who oppose Catron County ranchers are primarily outsiders. This poses a dilemma for the Forest Service. While environmental interests exist in Catron County, the Forest Service must balance the interests of local constituents with the interests of the larger public. Outside environmental groups are effective at gaining attention. The major environmental groups involved in litigation which affects Catron County are the Southwest Center for Biological Diversity from Tucson, Arizona, and the Forest Guardians, headquartered in Santa Fe, New Mexico (one rancher admired the "million dollar name.") These two groups filed the lawsuits which eventually went to court in the infamous Tucson case, as it is often called. Environmentalists who live in Catron County seem much less aggressive than the two outside groups. One resident said:

*"I get along with most ranchers. I bite my tongue like a lot of people. Some people are afraid to speak out for fear of being ostracized from the community." (state employee)*



Stories from other residents exemplified instances of ostracization. People with known environmentally-oriented views have a harder time finding work than those who "fit in" with the perceived dominant rancher culture.

*"She is recognized as an environmentalist in Catron County because she speaks out and because the majority of those who had the same views have left, for different reasons. You can't get a job easily with these views, so people leave for economic reasons."* (environmentalist)

This is due to a perception of the world in which environmentalists are not to be trusted.

*"Environmentalists are not well-thinking honest people."* (rancher)

Living in this atmosphere is difficult, another reason why many, less resistant, environmentalists leave. A known environmentalist who bought a store was worried that people would boycott the store, but she contributes to the county in other ways which help her fit in. As a result people have accepted her presence and they are not boycotting.

The conclusion is, while environmentalists are stereotyped and, as a whole not exactly welcomed in Catron County, decent, community-oriented people are welcomed. Until a person becomes known as an individual, he or she may have a difficult time overcoming stereotypes and settling in the county.

*Forest Service.* The Forest Service is perceived by Catron County residents as both a federal agency and a local entity. The employees of the Forest Service are seen as both decision-makers and as pawns of the larger Department of Agriculture system headquartered in Washington D.C. Employees are occasionally perceived as individuals but more often are simply viewed as representatives of the Forest Service, the agency, the federal government.

The Forest Service employs many residents of Catron County, and is a major economic contributor, as well as a nearly ubiquitous presence. Driving on the few roads which ramble through Catron County there are often campgrounds, trail heads, and rest stops that are managed by the Forest Service and marked by the familiar brown signs with creamy yellow lettering. There are several Forest Service buildings in the county including three ranger stations, work

stations and fire towers. And always there are "Forest Service green" trucks rolling by. This presence reminds residents that the Forest Service is locally situated and is directly and personally involved in the county, but it also represents the pervasiveness of the federal government.

*"We are the only government representatives around. If they have problems with the federal government, they blame the Forest Service because we are here."*

The same presence of the Forest Service which makes for a convenient target, also inhibits placing all of the blame for grazing management changes on the local entity. Residents have the ability to see the local Forest Service in action, and it is obvious that many of the management directives come not from the local rangers, but from higher-ups outside of the County, including the Regional Supervisor, and especially, "Them" in Washington. The word "Washington" is generally spoken with particular aversion.

*"The elements in Washington, which is primarily running the show out here, they make the decisions, not the local level."* (businessperson)

Other people believe that the district ranger is the most powerful position in the Forest Service, primarily because of a perceived lack of accountability. Even with the recognition of mandates from Washington, several people complained that no one in the Forest Service spoke out against the decisions and the implementation of lawsuit-directed management.

One of the most difficult social aspects endured by many Forest Service employees is the social stigma of their job. After the Tucson case, several ranchers, usually friendly enough, refused to shake hands with a range conservationist, many would not look him in the eye. He was no longer an individual, he was the Forest Service. Other employees have had similar experiences,

*"I am the Forest Service, the outside. Even conversations with friends always turn to issues with the Forest Service. I can't say anything. I have no personal opinion."*

In an attempt to inform himself of local ranching politics, a Forest Service employee tried to attend a public meeting. The resulting incident was widely publicized:

*"There was a meeting advertised at the courthouse to be held in Eagar, Arizona. It was sponsored by a permittees association and the speaker was Karen Budd-Falen. [John] asked me to leave. I said I just came to listen, I went out in the hall. They said the Forest Service was not welcome. In the hall they asked me to leave. I said no. Then 6 or 7 guys pretty much pushed me out. Newspaper said I was a spy. They said it was attorney client privilege so they had the right to throw me out."*

Although it is a minority that do not get along with the Forest Service, this apparently dominant minority has been effective in creating a recognizable dichotomy between the Forest Service and the other residents of the county.

*"There is a disparity of federal employees and locals, disparity creates resentment."*

(environmentalist)

*"Yes they are being shut out, cast out, used to call it shunned."* (advocate of local-control)

Effigies, upside down flags, even a public burning of the United Nations flag scared the Forest Service. Much of the overt anti-government action ceased after the Oklahoma City bombing, but the attitude and the rhetoric are still there. Several people mentioned an escalation of tensions and frustration to the point of concern about possible bloodshed.

*"It could get where somebody could take a life.... I really think that's a potential as this gets further along.... There's already been some talk and that's where it starts. People want to act and they don't know how."* (businessperson)

Frustration is at a high level for all the players in Catron County. Ranchers feel powerless to alter the course of changes that are taking place. Environmentalists feel that the Forest Service will forever cater to ranching interests. Meanwhile, the Forest Service is foraging for scarce middle ground.

*"The Forest Service is a unique instrument. There are so many pushes, powers at play. The Forest Service is being pushed in so many directions, they just go where they are being pushed the strongest. They are putting out present day fires, there's no leadership."* (longtime resident)

*"The Forest Service has historically catered to ranching and timbering. Where they are now is between a rock and hard place."* (environmentalist)

Unfortunately some people do not understand how the Forest Service can use its position as the land management agency to help amend the conflict over grazing management, a Forest Service range conservationist said:

*"I recommended to the district ranger that we take a six to eight month leave of absence and let the environmentalists and the ranchers fight it out."*

As individuals, as federal representatives, as a management agency, the Forest Service is in an unenviable central position. However, as the entity which manifests environmental legislation and management of public range lands, the Forest Service also possesses the capacity to work with all of the interest groups in Catron County. Efforts and suggestions to this end are discussed in later chapters.

### *Tensions*

Working with the people of Catron County will not be easy for the Forest Service. Tensions are high because of the loss of jobs in the timber industry after the spotted owl events several years earlier. Members of the community lost trust in the Forest Service during that episode and they see the impending changes in grazing management as a similar situation which could result in disastrous economic and social consequences again. Nearly every respondent commented on the thick atmosphere in Catron County.

*"It's going to change, there's nothing anybody can do about it"* (longtime resident)

*"The frustration level keeps getting higher."* (businessperson)

*"There was contention back then, but not near as what there is today."* (rancher)

*"It will get worse before it gets better."* (Forest Service employee)

*"The ranchers are accustomed to being catered to, it's tough to change. Sudden change."* (environmentalist)

*"It could get hotter than a firecracker, but it's happened before."* (State employee)

*"I'm afraid of... you push people too far and they explode. Enough's enough. It could get violent."* (rancher)

As these quotes show, many people in Catron County are frustrated, and nervous.

Frustration can be a volatile emotion but it is clear that nobody endorses violence in Catron County. There remains opportunity for socially acceptable alternative management. If a suitable means of agreement can be found with the Forest Service, the people of Catron County would embrace it. However, most informants suggested the likelihood of such an event would be slight indeed, because the Forest Service is considered unorganized and untrustworthy. The next chapter discusses the Forest Service in more detail.

## CHAPTER VI

### SOCIAL CHANGE AND THE FOREST SERVICE

Preceding chapters demonstrated how the communities and people in Catron County have reacted to changes in a variety of areas: social, political, and environmental. Because many changes were not welcomed by all residents of the county, tensions increased as a result of animosity between opposing viewpoints, and manifested in weakened relationships with the Forest Service in Catron County.

Environmental laws and ensuing lawsuits engendered a vitriolic distaste for federal land management in the county, so far as to inspire some residents to draft a county land plan declaring the county a land management entity and with ordinances prohibiting many federal actions.

A split developed between those who agreed with the principles of the land plan and those who did not agree, or did not care. Distinctions between insiders and outsiders within the county were magnified by this split, and by the influx of newcomers into the county. Stereotyping remained an essential means of polarizing the land management debate, in the face of nationally changing values for public land and resources. From this polarity emerged extremists on all sides, further supporting the stereotypes of ranchers, environmentalists, and the Forest Service. Changes in resource quality and use patterns in Catron County are a result of environmental laws, shifting values, and demographic alterations. Traditionally oriented users became frustrated with both the substantive changes, and more often with the pace and manner of change. Tensions escalated as the battle atmosphere heightened.

The Forest Service has been seen as both a cause and a pawn of these changes, and relationships with the Forest Service have suffered tremendously as a result. Although social and political barriers which have affected the county will present difficulties for mending this

relationship, a variety of sociological applications can support the effort to improve community relations.

### *Forest Service Changes and Problems*

Changes in the policies and goals of the U. S. Forest Service have affected local Forest Service districts and the communities in which they are located. Changing public values led to a shift from commodity oriented production to management with more focus on recreation and wildlife. In addition, the Forest Service has been bombarded with lawsuits enforcing policy adherence and substantive alterations. The combination of value changes and litigation has left the Forest Service in a quandary. While national public values direct their management protocol, local values are not always in agreement, and local communities that once relied on the commodities of the forest have lost trust and respect in the Forest Service. Forest Service employees have a difficult time regaining that trust and respect because the onslaught of lawsuits, as well as the paperwork required with NEPA processes, has kept them inside at desks instead of out on the land talking to and building rapport with local people.

Ranchers in Catron County are blaming the Forest Service, at least on the federal level, for policies that inhibit profitable stock raising operations. Environmentalists blame the Forest Service for catering to the ranching industry. Because the Forest Service is still in the process of change, it is perceived by environmentalists as an agency that continues historic tendencies of catering to ranchers, while ranchers feel the Forest Service, because of certain environmentally based policy changes (or recent adherence to policy ) is "in bed" with the environmentalists. Supporters of both sides, and those in between, have a variety of opinions, but they all agree that the Forest Service has changed dramatically over the past several years, for better and for worse and largely as a result of environmental pressure.

*"When we were first here in 1991 the Forest Service was willing to bend over backwards to help us with grazing leases. That attitude has changed 180 degrees. The Forest Service has a different mandate now." (newcomer)*

*"The Forest Service used to work with ranchers more than they are now. It's been a gradual decline over the years."* (rancher)

*"The Forest Service has been overly cooperative with ranchers and that's why they are in this position. They've let ranchers run the show."* (longtime resident)

The environmental pressure that caused changes in Forest Service land management has usually been mandated through legislation and litigation. Environmental groups, with the economic and political resources to influence land management, have found enormous power in the legal system.

*"There was a change when the environmentalists understood how powerful litigation was, a tremendous tool."* (forestry consultant)

*"That's when the environmental community got stronger. That's when it started getting hot."* (environmentalist)

*"The environmentalists are getting funds for lawyers through organizations. They have a cadre of lawyers who are pursuing this as a profession, this is their job, full time."* (rancher)

Unfortunately,

the result of these kinds of legislation has been the development of advocacy after the fact. Citizens who do not agree with a proposed action of the government seek redress in the courts, thus assuring instant polarization of the issue and leaving little or no opportunity for any kind of resolution not mandated by the court. This is not effective public participation, in the real sense, and seems only to crystallize opposing points of view. (Greenwalt 1979:18)

One reason it is usually environmentalists fronting lawsuits is that local rural people tend to have fewer resources and a lack of organization for such processes (Carroll 1995). Catron County did manage to stall the Forest Service and the Fish and Wildlife Service with their critical habitat lawsuit, proving that both sides can use environmental legislation in their favor, but in the long run, relationships with other groups are severely damaged.

The policies of the Forest Service may be slightly behind the times in terms of the value of natural resources and consequent land management, and that may hinder positive local relationships with the Forest Service. But as one Forest Service employee feels, there are agreeable means of avoiding costly, acrimonious litigation.



*"It goes back to that local flexibility. The Forest Service is not in a position to force cattle grazing. If it comes down to it we'll work out something. There are things that are outdated and make no sense. We are trying to work with people."*

While environmental litigation can serve to encourage management in accord with the public shift in values for natural resources, it may have negative consequences for all involved. Polarization can occur because of the definition of opposing sides and an eradication of cooperative opportunities involved in a lawsuit situation. Additionally, while the results of the lawsuit may be acceptable, the means of achieving such ends are not highly regarded. For the Forest Service, litigation increases paperwork. Both Forest Service employees and residents of Catron County have complained about the amount of time Forest Service employees spend indoors, instead of out on the land.

*"Things have changed a lot... especially in the last two years. We used to be able to get out more, now we have to do more paperwork, especially with this litigation."* (Forest Service employee)

*"The Forest Service depends on the employee and whether or not they spend much time on the ground and with ranchers."* (rancher)

*"I had my fences cut and the forest ranger would say, what happened? We'd go out and take pictures, patch the fence. That's the way it should be. We never had a problem. There was a local man on the scene. Now we get letters saying we are trespassing and we'll be fined. There's no on-site management."* (rancher)

Individual personalities within the Forest Service are often critical to maintaining trusting relationships with constituents. However, some employees are more interested in getting "work" done than in maintaining amicable relations through personable employees:

*"Earlier forest rangers had time and economics on their side, which is why they had less trouble than today. The Forest Service was production oriented and people who were doers, or driving personalities, were promoted. Today there are more amiable personalities in the Forest Service, leaders who are good with people. But this means they are not getting as much done."* (Forest Service district ranger)

Unfortunately, while developing working relationships with people takes time, many do not view it as "work." Although building relationships is not the sole purpose of social science applications to resource management the inclusion of social science into land management can be

hindered further or overcome by the decision-making personalities in the Forest Service. One particularly perceptive Forest Service employee who believed that tensions in the county would get worse, nonetheless remained optimistic, saying:

*"This district is looking to change their relationship with the county.... We've come a long way. A lot of the change is due to changes in personnel in the Forest Service and the county commission.... It's about getting away from the extremes."*

Less personal contact with the Forest Service, in addition to policy changes, has reduced trust levels in Catron County. The lack of trust is ubiquitous, and with no immediate solution in sight.

*"There used to be an acceptable trust level, even when it wasn't great, it was acceptable. I don't know where that is today."* (Forest Service employee)

*"Trust level... how do we get that back?"* (Forest Service employee)

*"If you polled the folks at the livestock meeting yesterday you would probably find zero trust level. If you asked visitors from New York or L. A. or recreation traffic on the [continental divide] trail, it would be much higher. It's political."* (Forest Service district ranger)

The lack of trust, less time spent on the ground or talking personally with people, new changes in Forest Service management policies--these all contribute to a local lack of respect for the Forest Service. One old-time rancher recalled a cattle drive when the rancher had enough respect to stop all of the cattle when he met the forest ranger on the road, and they visited with him. "Now they just wave or put their hand out, they're just different." Another resident remembers when he was young how the Forest Service uniforms commanded respect, and noted that they do not wear uniforms very much anymore. He remembered the ranger coming to dinner with his family. That does not happen anymore either. Even non-ranching residents felt that the Forest Service has strayed from the congenial, respected institution it once was, into a paper-laden bureaucracy.

*"I remember growing up with the Forest Service. They were part of the community. Now they've lost that community affiliation."* (advocate of local-control)

As a result of constant antagonism in Catron County, the Forest Service has found itself in a precarious position in the political and social arenas. Land management is often at a

stalemate. The social forces which have led to this situation will require much attention if land management is to be a socially informed and socially acceptable practice by the Forest Service in the county. This situation is not new; similar social circumstances and other events have led to land management problems in many areas. "Agency attention has been squandered on growing administrative burdens, while underfunding, lack of ecologically trained field staff, and of course, the constant need to deal with controversy and opposing interests have kept the agencies from focusing on land stewardship" (Riebsame and Woodmansee 1995:76). Fortunately, there are systems and tools in place that can contribute to ecologically and socially sustainable rangeland management.

*Barriers to Forest Service Management  
in Catron County*

Before any advance toward socially acceptable land management succeeds, a number of obstacles will need to be overcome. It would be idealistic to assume that change, either in minimizing the obstacles or in improving land management, will come quickly and without difficulty. In fact, as has been recorded, a slower pace in land management changes, with ample time for public input and acceptance, may be healthier for all involved.

A major obstacle to overcome will be the strong stereotyping of groups and personalities. Recognition of differences and values is important as long as it is acknowledgment, not judgment. Values may continue to change as the process of land management occurs. Also, the trend of outside, bureaucratic management is a perceived, if not substantive, obstacle. Currently, many do not believe that localized, "on-the-ground" work can coexist with larger systems. Finally, all parties involved will need accurate, unbiased information. Communication and self-education are the responsibility of those involved.

Stereotyping is "thick and heavy" in Catron County, according to many residents, and the series of environmental lawsuits has further polarized and pigeon-holed many groups and

individuals. New people will continue to move into, travel through, and take an interest in Catron County. Newcomers, insiders, ranchers, environmentalists, retirees, long-term residents, and extremists will eventually need to learn to live with and among one another without scorn and spite. The Forest Service will be required to deal with all of these groups of people, as well as national interests, and all of these groups may learn to live with the Forest Service, as a service instead of a scapegoat. "Government regulation is a symptom of something wrong, not a cause" (Churchman 1979:3). The social atmosphere and idiosyncrasies of Catron County currently are not equipped to contribute to socially informed federal land management. To amend this, the role of the Forest Service should be defined by people within the county, and by the Forest Service itself. Currently, the Forest Service is having a difficult time asserting its role and values. They say:

*"We make an argument, we get sued."*

Others reflect this sentiment:

*"The Forest Service is afraid to do anything."* (rancher)

*"They just go where they are being pushed the strongest."* (business person)

*"The Forest Service decides the best thing to do is nothing. They don't make a decision."* (rancher)

According to Lackey (1998) this is the worst thing to do, "As with all management paradigms, there is no 'right' decision but rather those decisions that appear to best respond to society's current and potential future needs as expressed through a decision-making process. There are, however, wrong management decisions, including the decision not to make a decision" (p. 2).

Decision-making in the Forest Service is hampered by stereotyping that tends to polarize issues and ideas, by litigation which also polarizes as well as creates a distasteful atmosphere and increases paperwork, and also by a lack of local input and planning.

The local Forest Service has strayed from the person to person contact that was once the rule to a more faceless entity, seemingly a pawn of a larger system. Can this change?

*"There is frustration at the local level of policies that they have no choice but to implement; if they had their say so they wouldn't do it the way Washington is directing them to do it."* (newcomer)

*"I think there are things the Forest Service can do to help. Getting away from the broad brush strokes. How do you manage a national agency for specific decision making?"* (environmentalist)

Although certain laws and regulations must be adhered to, the interpretation of specifics and the means of applying those regulations are things the local Forest Service can do to help. More than the decisions themselves, planning for a decision is crucial. And this is the stage in which the public must be included.

*Socially Informed Management: What Works and What Does Not*

There is probably no single cure-all method of resolution to ease tensions in Catron County. Instead an amalgam of efforts may be necessary. Not every effort will be successful. Already, both the Forest Service and Catron County have recognized and attempted to amend their less than ideal working relationship with varying results. The following is a summary of the attempted projects.

The Forest Service tried an Action Plan which was a general outline of an intent to promote local economic improvements. The plan's objectives were to work cooperatively with the Catron County commissioners through various means of communication and to help alleviate misunderstandings and mistrust between the Forest Service and the commission through activities, including supporting local economic studies, determining effective means of media communication, and attending commission meetings, commodity user group meetings, and environmental interest meetings. This process may have helped communication, especially with Forest Service attendance at commission meetings, but by itself was ineffective for land management purposes. Additionally, the Forest Service felt it was wasting time by attending commission meetings with no relevance to Forest land management.

The initial willingness of the Forest Service and county representatives to participate in the MOU, described earlier, was a positive step which was unfortunately negated when the MOU dissolved. However, other means of approaching the problem are currently being addressed. For example, Southwest Strategy is an idea on the part of several federal agencies, including the Forest Service and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, to work with each other and together with state, tribal, and local governments. As of yet, there are no specific actions described but the idea of working together is getting attention. The program is in its infancy.

Ecosystem management is a concept which is being implemented across the full spectrum of resource management agencies, including the Forest Service. Ecosystem management is a management strategy which includes social factors in an ecosystem context. Although the broadened attention to social values that accompanies ecosystem management could provide a mechanism for addressing the problems identified in this research, the application of ecosystem management in Catron County is slow. The data suggest a couple of reasons for the lack of immediate implementation in Catron County. First, the increase in litigation, and the analysis and reporting requirements associated with this, as well as the NEPA process, has proportionately increased paperwork required of Forest Service employees, resulting in less available time for field work or the transition to a new management strategy. Current management practices remain static while paperwork gets shuffled and adaptations are made to accommodate litigation. Also, the unfamiliarity and novelty of a broad concept like ecosystem management is a change both agency employees and Catron County residents are wary of:

*"Ecosystem management, don't like the sound, I don't think anybody knows what it mean.... I'm tired of hearing about it. It's a Forest Service buzzword. I'd rather deal with more practical things." (rancher)*

*"Ecosystem Management makes us work together more, and look into the long term, and the bigger picture, instead of each group doing the individual projects. There is a goal to work towards. We could get a lot more done. We are on our way to this, but to make it work we have to jump in and no one is willing, even me. I have been here a few years and we all get stuck in our ways." (Forest Service employee)*

Although there is a long way to go before the benefits of ecosystem management are recognized, the Forest Service is at least preparing for a new, socially sustainable, management strategy.

The Catron County Citizens Group was formed after the spotted owl issue arose to reduce tensions and improve the socioeconomic situation in the county. The mission of the group is "to serve as a forum to enable people with different views to openly and honestly discuss issues that concern our community; to find common ground in order to take action on projects that endure an economic, social, and environmentally sound future" (Catron County Citizens Group 1998).

While informative and beneficial, the group is not inclusive of all Catron County residents. However, in the two meetings which I attended, representation of commodity interests, environmental interests, Forest Service (though not official) and businesspeople, as well as concerned citizens, was present. The group discussed means of improving the socioeconomic situation of the county, such as industry and business diversification and small-diameter lumber, and they also discussed prominent issues such as the Tucson case.

Several prominent residents of the county attend the monthly meetings of the Catron County Citizens Group. Even extremists admit the group is a good idea and has made progress, but there are often setbacks and frustration, as indicated by this dialogue witnessed at one meeting:

*"We need to get beyond the finger pointing."* (Forest Service)

*"I'm going to keep finger pointing!"* (rancher)

The group has successfully planned salvage timber sales and grazing management projects; and all agree that meetings are less vitriolic than they used to be. But the collaborative effort can be time-consuming, and does not have the enforcement of the legal system behind it. Participants feel that outside environmental groups have undermined the group with quick lawsuits.

*"The collaborative process isn't working because we can't catch up with the lawsuits."*

(Citizens Group participant)



Earlier it was noted that groups can circumvent forest management decisions by going to the courts, but this method is extremely detrimental to efforts to enhance social aspects of land management. Collaborative efforts are becoming an acceptable means of land management planning for those that are not on extreme ends of an issue. Unlike extremists, those who seek amenable policies are willing to search for alternatives. Riebsame and Woodmansee (1995) have suggested setting aside extremist views and searching for shared values and pragmatic solutions.

Finding common ground, and moving toward rangeland sustainability, will take meetings and more meetings, and time out on the land. Perhaps most important, it will take more openness. Public lands ranchers cannot seclude themselves behind the ranch gate or in producer organizations, agency folks must get out of their offices, and environmental activists cannot continue to distance themselves from the rural society that their advocacy affects (p. 81)

These authors see the need for communication and public involvement on an organized, as well as an informal level. Collaborative planning groups and on-the-ground contacts are part of this communication process.

### *Public Involvement*

Public involvement has become somewhat of a buzzword among public land managers, although it seems that few have a good grasp on the definition. Public involvement is an umbrella term for a wide variety of ways to include people into land management planning. Contrary to many beliefs, it is not a decision-making process. The general purpose of public involvement is to include a representation of as many stakeholder and interest groups as possible, to build confidence, and to generate information. It is most useful for what should be done and less relevant for how to do things (Wambach 1979).

Robert Wambach has neatly categorized several types of public involvement processes into four groups. This categorization scheme aids in understanding what public involvement is, and how to use it effectively. Public involvement is likely to reach a greater audience if several methods are utilized.



According to Wambach, one type of public involvement is called structured. If the local Forest Service provided specific contacts for public comments or questions on grazing issues, that would fit in this category. As the report from the Forest Service regional office indicates, the Forest Service does not have a structural system for public contacts or consistent informal communication (Service Trip Report 1993). Formal avenues for commenting do exist in the NEPA process.

The second type of public involvement is called informal, which includes community involvement by employees, professional contacts, and participation or cooperation with special interest groups. The purpose of informal public involvement is direct communication, be it personal contact, phone calls, or letters to environmental groups or local government in order to keep informed and to show interest. In Catron County, residents have expressed their concern that the Forest Service lacks personal service and rapport with local residents.

Another category of Wambach's is called formal public involvement. Public meetings, document reviews, and media monitoring are included in this category. Meetings which the Forest Service attends as agency representatives, such as certain county commission meetings, fit into this category. Also, responding to the media is an important method of public involvement by listening to what other groups are saying through the media and responding to accounts of the Forest Service. The Forest Service Action Plan included the use of media communication to clarify their position and involve the public.

Finally, information and education is a means of public involvement. Brochures or videos, public service announcements, public addresses, and utilizing the media for the purpose of information and education, not just defense, are included in this category. Hearings on land policy and what it means are important, such as when the Forest Service explained what the listing of the endangered Mexican spotted owl would mean to the community. The Forest

Service did no such public meeting to specifically address recent litigation including the Tucson case.

Each of these categories is a functional part of public involvement but Wambach emphatically states that "personal contact is still the best form of public involvement" (p.23). As most of the residents of Catron County stated, personal contact with the Forest Service has markedly decreased. More personal contact would undeniably help restore trust in the Forest Service.

### *Collaborative Groups*

In the wake of litigation and the county supremacy movement giving more power, symbolically if not legally, to local governments, the Forest Service is realizing "that collaborative approaches may be the best and only chance to influence the direction of natural resource policy" (Selin et al. 1997:25). The reasons for this are threefold.

First, it is possible for unsatisfied groups to force strict interpretations of land management policy to suit their preferences through the use of lawsuits. This leaves the Forest Service in a relatively powerless situation with little or no time for implementation.

Second, collaborative approaches provide an opportunity to create policies which reflect the values of all concerned parties. Heberlein found that "rangeland attitudes are strongly tied to values, and value-based attitudes can be highly resistant to change" (Brunson and Steele 1997:46). One advantage of collaborative processes is the inclusion of values in consideration for land management. In an effective collaborative process no single value for rangelands dominates other value-based uses for the land. Although changes are inevitable, collaborative processes present a means of defining and implementing slower, more acceptable changes in rangeland management.

Perhaps the most important reason that many collaborative groups can be effective is because of something called procedural justice. Lawrence, Daniels, and Stankey (1997)

explained that "the perceived fairness of public participation procedures can affect public satisfaction as much as the substantive nature of the resulting decision" (p. 578). From the reaction to court decisions and fast-paced Forest Service policy decisions in Catron County, the manner in which decisions are made, beyond the control of the public, is infuriating to local people. Carroll (1995) found this same phenomenon in the northwest: "it was the timing and manner of decision making that resulted in the most adverse impacts" (p. 146). The reason for this seems to lie in the sense of powerlessness felt when decisions affecting people and land are seemingly made without concern for the local people and their lifestyle. Collaborative groups can abet this feeling of powerlessness because they give people a chance to communicate directly with other groups and with the decision makers. In fact, according to Cohen (1985), "psychological work on procedural justice suggests that people given the opportunity to participate in a decision are more likely to see that decision as just than those given no such opportunity" (p. 643).

The Tucson case is a perfect example of this. The lawsuit was brought by environmental groups against the Forest Service. Cattlegrowers intervened. When the case went to court in Tucson, the plaintiffs and defendant settled before the intervenors had a chance to speak. These events caused the cattlegrowers to feel left out of the process, and angry at the Forest Service.

*"The Forest Service, in my opinion, would not solicit any input if they didn't have to."*

(rancher)

According to some residents, if the case had been heard through, with the cattlegrowers' participation, and similar policy results occurred, the cattlegrowers would have been less upset.

Although it may appear from the concept of procedural justice that the simple inclusion of public input into decision planning can satisfy the public, agencies should be wary of their role in the process. Wambach (1979) made it clear that public input is useful for planning what should be done, not how. "It would be unrealistic and inefficient to involve the public directly in the

design of the bridge, rocket or species recovery plan" (p. 13). There is a difference between what public input can effectively influence, like the timing and manner of decision making, and what is overlapping the job of the Forest Service, such as evaluating alternatives and actually making the decision. Nelkin (1979) worded this idea very carefully: "What distinguishes the more collaborative kinds of participation is the inclusion of public representatives, not simply as informants, but as partners with some power to assure that agencies act on the basis of their preferences." (p. 13) Nelkin was suggesting that the degree of power given to collaborative participants is important. Participants must feel that they are being heard, without feeling that they have the power to dominate other values. This delicate balance is often upset when agencies settle for what Cohen (1985) calls pseudoparticipation, wherein "techniques are employed by those who have already made, or are about to make, a decision to persuade those affected by it to accept it" (p. 650). This is not what collaboration, or public involvement is about. Blahna and Yonts-Shepard (1990) call this MAD: make a decision, announce the decision, and defend the decision. Again the problem with this is the lack of public input in planning, in the timing or manner of the decision-making. The public is being persuaded, not consulted. Yet another way to describe this is Agency-centric (Walker and Daniels 1996). In these examples, the agency does not allow the public to substantively participate. Instead public involvement is merely a superficial formality.

There is a lot of work to be done on the part of the Forest Service if they are to establish socially sustainable land management policies. Effective public involvement is essential, but not easy. Hurdling bureaucratic tendencies and changing the way things are done in the Forest Service will take time. The inclusion of the public into land management is a relatively new practice for land management agencies; the Forest Service was founded on the idea that technical experts know best. The Forest Service was not founded with a focus on using technical expertise for social resources, and the old ideas still linger with longtime district rangers,

*"We have to make decisions based on what's best for the resource, not whether or not we have good managers."* (Forest Service district ranger)

Although technical range experts probably do know what is best for the specific resource, for broad planning purposes the inclusion of social factors is necessary and requires incorporating the values of people into land management decisions.

## CHAPTER VII

### SUMMARY AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS

#### *Summary*

The history of natural resource dependence in Catron County has contributed to a unique social structure in which many people place deeply rooted social values on cattle ranching. National trends toward environmentalism have filtered into this rural county and often conflict with traditional uses for public lands, namely grazing. Policy changes in public land management are implemented by the Forest Service and for this the Forest Service has been placed between groups in disagreement.

Grazing management policies in the Forest Service are, on the broadest level, federally mandated. However, flexibility in management allows for changes and alternatives which can suit the needs of various situations in local areas. The social structure in Catron County, which tends to stereotype ranchers and environmentalists, and dichotomizes insiders and outsiders, provides a barrier to cooperative land management. Efforts to minimize conflict, such as the Catron County Citizens Group, have shown that collaborative planning concepts can work, albeit slowly, and alone they are not a panacea.

In terms of the human dimensions of natural resource management, this study was a specific examination of one area and one particular resource; the management of grazing lands in Catron County. The research was organized by means of three sets of inquiries, the findings of which are summarized here. Note that these findings are specific to the particular groups and issues in this research.

1. In what ways does the history of natural resource dependence in Catron County relate to current social and political friction over grazing management and changes to grazing practices, as well as relationships with grazing managers?

The social values of grazing in Catron County are largely symbolic and historic. Cattle ranchers founded the area and ranching communities thus defined the cultural atmosphere. Furthermore, as an isolated area, the independence of early ranchers persists in the values of residents today. Evidence of this is the County's leadership in the county rights movement and often strong vehemence toward federal government regulations. Forest Service restrictions on grazing practices are not only unwelcome, they are viewed as a threat to the continuation of a lifestyle. The increase in environmentally conscious laws has created more paperwork for the Forest Service and more red tape for ranchers. Together, this has led to a decline in on-the-ground working relationships between the Forest Service and many residents of Catron County. Although these are issues for the Forest Service as a national resource management agency, the conflicts created by these issues are often manifested at the district level.

2. In terms of grazing lands, who are the key constituents or influence groups of the Forest Service in Catron County with respect to the particular policy context outlined in this study? What interest groups exist within and outside the county?

The groups in Catron County which have an interest in grazing land management are most broadly defined as ranchers and environmentalists. There exist obvious demarcations between internal and external groups of ranchers and environmentalists. Environmental groups outside the county and state cattlegrowers organizations are also heavily involved in land management within Catron County. Residents of Catron County, businesspeople, newcomers, etc. who are not strictly ranchers or environmentalists generally have opinions which favor one side or the other. All of these people also have an opinion on how the Forest Service should manage cattle grazing. The residents of the county are a varied group. Although the land area of Catron County is large, the sense of community is small, which means that everyone in the county tends to know what is going on. The actions of the Forest Service affect many residents directly, and this affects all of the residents through ripples of dissension or agreement.

3. To what extent does the Forest Service solicit and process information from or about these groups of people? In what ways do management decisions reflect consideration of public input and/or social assessment efforts?

At present there is no comprehensive social assessment process that would provide for full consideration of human-dimension factors that are linked to grazing management issues. Although there is no evidence that the Forest Service in Catron County actively solicits information from all interest groups, inside and outside the county, they do recognize the need for public input on grazing decisions. They are moving in a positive direction by attempting such plans as the MOU with the county, and moving towards ecosystem management as a framework for making grazing decisions that include the dynamic issues of community linkages to natural resources. Although the Forest Service has a grasp on the ecological and economic components of ecosystem management, they have yet to harness the social aspects and functions which may prove to be the most difficult yet important. In Catron County the links between people and the land are as diverse as the interest groups, from ranchers to environmentalists. One might argue that management decisions reflect consideration of varying publics for the sole reason that nobody seems to be happy with Forest Service decisions. Ranchers accuse the Forest Service of siding with environmental concerns, and environmental groups accuse the Forest Service of continuing a long tradition of catering to ranchers. Although they may never please every group, the Forest Service can do better than pleasing no one.

#### *Limitations and Suggestions*

The Glenwood district of the U.S. Forest Service was generous in providing housing during my research in Catron County. However, because Catron County has a small-town atmosphere where word of mouth is a powerful means of communication, I soon became aware that many residents believed I was working directly for the Forest Service. Even as I attempted to



clarify this perception, it became obvious to me that any association at all with the Forest Service somewhat biased my presence in the minds of many residents.

It would have been difficult to avoid this source of bias for two reasons. The first is that it is true I was working closely *with* the Forest Service, although not directly *for* the Forest Service. Secondly, any place I would have found to live in the county during the time I was conducting research would have been associated with somebody, who would probably be recognized as favoring one side or another (whether or not he or she actually did.) So there would likely have been preconceived notions of bias from some sector of the residents of Catron County regardless of where I stayed.

Catron County is so large, and the population so spread out that I was not able to reach as many people as I would have liked due simply to time restraints. The amount of time I had to conduct research was not ample enough to contact a large number of residents. Further research would be useful in the following areas: more qualitative interviews which would coincide with another period of time, essentially taking a pulse of the community at that time. Furthermore, a compilation of quantitative data would be useful in more closely defining the population and characteristics of the county. The land management and grazing issues at hand in Catron County are not likely to be short lived and it would be useful to sociologists and natural resource managers to document the changes that are occurring as a result of these issues.

### *Policy Implications*

As part of a larger government entity, the Forest Service in Catron County has to abide by certain mandates and of course must follow the law. Within that, however, there is an opportunity for flexibility and interpretation. Using this flexibility to the best advantage of the land and the people with an interest in it requires sociological work on the dynamics between people and grazing lands and the impacts of Forest Service actions.

Planning for this kind of decision-making will take time, effort, and foresight.

Unfortunately, the Forest Service is currently in a position where large-scale management changes are not considered a possibility, because they are already behind schedule on current management programs. Without actively pursuing socially informed management alternatives, the Forest Service may never catch up. This study suggests that avoiding the stalemate in which the Forest Service has found itself may be possible if the agency works to build effective formal and informal communication processes involving local residents and constituents.

Informal communication will require Forest Service employees, at all levels, to spend as much time as possible out of the office. Often, a 2-minute management message from the Forest Service may require a 10-minute preamble conversation with a local resident, rancher, or tourist.

A systematic but flexible approach to grazing management, like ecosystem management, can help to dissolve some of the communication barriers between opposed viewpoints through comprehensive management which included human linkages to the land and also considers endangered species before management becomes federally or court mandated.

Formal quantitative analysis can help managers to understand who their constituents are in a scientific manner, instead of a "squeaky wheel gets the oil" system. Recognizing the common ground between constituents, instead of noting their differences, will provide a better understanding of the various natural resource relationships shared by residents. This can benefit natural resource managers by revealing the social impacts of agency actions, which can then be used to predict where conflict might occur in the future, and to prepare for potentially adverse situations.

Understanding stakeholders and constituents can also occur through studies like this one, which outline a community's historic and current values and relationships toward land management. Additionally, social assessments that provide resource managers with a "pulse" of their constituents on a formal level, combined with informal communication between agency

personnel and local residents, are the key factors in making socially acceptable land management decisions.

### *Conclusion*

Although good ecological science should remain an important goal, many of the issues confronting the Forest Service are political and social issues. Trying to plow through grazing management problems using only the best range science is not enough, as recent experience has proven. Social science information can help in the development of management strategies which balance the values of a greater variety of interest groups and provide links between these groups and land managers in order to facilitate effective communication and cooperation. In sum, the process of making land-management decisions can be informed best through both on-the-ground social interactions between the Forest Service and local residents, in combination with formal social science data.

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## APPENDICES



## APPENDIX A

## Interview Protocol

Name(s)

Date

Location of Interview

Occupation

Length of Residence  
(approximate age)

Community

Why did you move to Catron County? Why do you stay in Catron County?

How have things changed?

Who is moving in? why?

Forest Service

Opinion of the Forest Service? How are they currently managing public lands? Grazing lands?

Are they involved in the community? In the county?

Do they consider local concerns in land management decisions? If so how? Is this info solicited?

Has the Forest Service changed? Policies? Why?

BLM

Opinion? What are they doing that works? What doesn't work?

Relationship with people in the county?

Local concerns considered in land management decisions? How? Is this info solicited?

How does management style differ?

Why is the BLM not plagued with same issues as Forest Service?

Are their constituents different?

Grazing

Is ranching important to Catron County? Lifestyle or economics?

What instigated the current situation and debates over grazing?

Who is involved?

Details

What are the major areas/issues of contention? Disagreement?

What does each group want?

What can the Forest Service do about it?

## Appendix B

## Map of Catron County, New Mexico

